

NEGOTIATIONS OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING:  
A CASE STUDY OF CHINESE CHRISTIAN  
IMMIGRANTS IN STAVANGER

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to understand how Chinese Christian immigrants negotiate their identity and sense of belonging, and to investigate the following questions: 1) How do Chinese Christian immigrants negotiate their identities in a multicultural society like Norway? 2) How do they perceive their sense of belonging as immigrants? 3) What role does the Chinese church and their Christian beliefs have in shaping their identities and sense of belonging? To answer these questions, I rely on data obtained from qualitative research methods including in-depth interviews of nine Chinese Christian immigrants, and participant observation at the Nordic Chinese Christian Church of Stavanger. I propose that the lived experiences of Chinese Christians in Norway can be understood as ‘transnational,’ as migrants sustain ties to both host and origin societies, as well as co-ethnics around the world. These connections impact their identity and sense of belonging as immigrants facing new values and perspectives of their settlement country. I argue that this results in a negotiation process where migrants blend various aspects of both sending and receiving societies. I also argue that this negotiation of identity and belonging must be understood with notions of multiplicity and fluidity as the world is changing under globalization. Furthermore, I examine religion and migration, arguing that to understand Chinese Christians we must acknowledge the transnationalization of religious life and the increasing identification to non-territorial religious identity and belonging.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NCCC Stavanger ----- Nordic Chinese Christian Church of Stavanger

US ----- United States

UK ----- United Kingdom

SSB ----- Statistics Norway (Statistisk Sentralbyrå)



## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

Who are the Chinese in Norway? What are their lives like and how do they perceive themselves and their belonging within a multicultural society? Areas of identity, belonging and migration are becoming a hot topic in today's age as the world becomes more and more connected under globalization. Indeed, "from discussions of identity politics to discussions of the modern self, the issue of identity sticks out as one of the most important in modern-day life" (Anthias 2006, 21). Thus, a good starting point to understand the complex lives of migrants is to examine how they negotiate and (re)construct their identities, and how they search and locate ways to belong. Moreover, religion has been seen to play an important role within the immigrant experience. Therefore, to ignore religion would be to take out a large piece of the puzzle. Thus, this thesis investigates members of the Nordic Chinese Christian Church of Stavanger, to get a glimpse of the negotiation process of identity and belonging of Chinese Christian immigrants, and the role their beliefs play in these processes.

#### **Background of the Study**

In this section, I will provide a general background of Chinese migration and then more specific background on the Chinese church in Stavanger. I believe this is important to contextualize the study and understand the situation of the Overseas Chinese community on a local and global level. I will then discuss my own personal interest in the topic.

#### *The Overseas Chinese*

Chinese migration is an old tradition, where traditional sojourning began as a condition of trade (Wang 2000, 53). There is even a famous Chinese saying: "Close to the sea, there will always be overseas Chinese" (Kwan 2013, 1). With a population of an estimated ten thousand (SSB 2016b), the Chinese make up a relatively small minority group in Norway. However, they are the oldest and largest ethnic minority in several European countries including Britain, France, and the Netherlands (Pieke 1998, 4-5). Within Norway, Oslo has the largest population with three to four thousand Chinese immigrants and the second is Stavanger with

approximately one thousand<sup>1</sup>. Hong Kong seamen first came to Norway in the 1960s as employees for a large Norwegian shipping company. These seamen were permitted to retire in Norway and jumpstarted “chain migration,” resulting in the formation of larger Chinese communities by the 1980s via migrant networks (Kwan 2013, 75). Eventually, there was also a shift from Hong Kong Chinese to Mainland Chinese coming for work and/or education. According to Østby (2008), Chinese roles and occupations as well as their duration of stay are more diverse than other immigrant groups. They also maintain a higher employment rate than any other comparable group, with many being self-employed. As such, a majority of the Chinese in Norway have some kind of connection to the catering industry (Kwan 2013, 89). Pastor Yeung confirmed this when he said: *“God allowed us to know more about the Overseas Chinese culture, because most of the people, at that time in the UK, or in European countries or all over the world, they are doing catering, take-away and restaurant.”* Several scholars (Kalvø 2007; Thunø 1997; Van Ziegert 2006) have described the Chinese as a ‘silent’ migrant group in Norway where little attention has been paid to Chinese people’s motivations for migration or how they are handling Norwegian society.

#### *NCCC Stavanger*

The Chinese church in Stavanger was officially established in 2003 by Chinese missionary couple, Pastor and Mrs. Yeung. They were employed by the missionary committee of the Nordic Chinese Christian Church, a partnership of seven Overseas Chinese congregations throughout the Nordic countries. The congregation in Stavanger began in 1983 as a small Chinese fellowship and part of the larger international meeting that took place in the Norwegian church, Salem. Several retired, mandarin-speaking Norwegian missionaries cared for these Chinese, as well as visitors from Overseas Chinese churches in Oslo, England, the United States and Canada. Both Salem and NCCC Oslo saw the need for Chinese missionaries to care for these Chinese Christians on a more permanent basis. Thus, Salem helped support the Yeungs when they first arrived in Stavanger. After three months, NCCC Oslo asked the missionaries to settle a separate Chinese church in Stavanger with a vision to focus on the local Chinese, particularly those in catering. Due to separate visions, Salem and the Chinese fellowship respectively parted ways.

Thus, NCCC Stavanger was established after setting a meeting place at Nygatens Forsamlingshus. The church came under the NCCC umbrella, whose purpose is to

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<sup>1</sup> According to Pastor Yeung in a conversation with him and his wife on 21 June 2017

demonstrate unity in Christ by working together, providing a spiritual ‘home’ for Nordic Chinese Christians, preaching the Gospel, and nurturing believer’s spiritual life<sup>2</sup>. The church is described as “inter-denominational, crossing culture, tradition and language differences, nurturing brothers and sisters to love one another in mutual encouragement and spiritual growth.” NCCC Stavanger also has a focus on families, where Pastor Yeung makes many home visits and is well known by the wider Chinese community. The congregation is the smallest of the Nordic churches with around forty to fifty regular attendees; and is female dominant with a ratio of seventy-thirty, females to males. Church activities focus on studying God’s Word, worship and prayer, fellowship, serving in church, and spreading the Gospel. The church has three weekly Bible studies, and several ministries including a joint youth network with NCCC, women’s groups, Gospel outreach days, cultural celebrations, and international mission trips.

### *Personal Interest*

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 20-24) describe how research can often be stimulated from a range of causes, from curiosity to personal experience. My experience with the Chinese started when I studied abroad in Hong Kong and visited Mainland China. I had the opportunity to interview local students and get a glimpse of their lifestyles and ways of thinking. I continued this study after graduation when I moved to Northern Ireland, and interviewed 10 female Chinese exchange students studying at Queen’s University of Belfast. Within this time, I also got involved in a small group with atheist Chinese students where we discussed a range of topics on life, faith, and values. This built a curiosity in the religious dimension of migrants, particularly for Chinese Christians who I had yet to meet. Thus, when I learned that the Chinese had a Christian church here in Stavanger, I became keen to hear the stories of these Chinese Christians and to understand the impact their religious beliefs had on their identity and migrant experience.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review discusses research investigations related to the Overseas Chinese community within a variety of domains, as well as migration studies related to transnationalism and belonging. There has been a considerable amount of studies on the topic of religion, migration, and identity as researchers start to realize the importance of this once

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<sup>2</sup> Information taken from the NCCC Website on 10 July 2017

neglected field (Kivisto 2014, 6-7). Peggy Levitt (2007a) is well known for her work on transnational studies and the changing religious landscape within the United States. She believes that religious identity and belonging will increase through globalization and transnational connections. Fenggang Yang (1999) has investigated Chinese Christians in America, where he locates adhesive identities as a major trend of migrant adaptation and negotiation. He also situates this identity reconstruction within the Chinese church, and through participant observation argues that religious conversion of Chinese Christians often occurs because of a variety of contextual factors, such as the recent social and cultural changes in China, immigrant experiences in pluralistic societies, and active proselytization of evangelical Christians (Yang and Tamney 2006). Chung's (2006) PhD dissertation of Chinese young people in Australia discusses the role of the church as a spiritual home, as well as dual identity and multicultural spirituality under the impact of globalization. Regionally, Peter Kivisto (2014) has written on migrant faiths in North America and Western Europe. He looks more generally at religion on the move, identity, organizations and transnational networks. Flemming Christiansen (2003) has conducted research on the identity of Overseas Chinese in Europe, where he looks at how identity changes over time and factors that influence it. In relation to the Nordic countries, researcher Mette Thunø (1997) has studied Chinese immigrants in Denmark with a focus on catering and ethnicity, with findings showing a correlation between business practices and Chinese values. Pattaporn's (2012) Master's thesis investigates transnational identities and belonging among Thai female immigrants in Sweden. Based off of a feminist-theory approach, she found that identity reconstruction occurred in relation to one's perception of identity within the receiving society.

In Norway, research on the Chinese is rather limited outside of a few Master's theses. Zhu's (2015) thesis on Chinese immigrants' parental experiences found that parental practices were shaped by personal background and status, as well as contextual factors of acculturation. Kwan's (2013) history of Chinese immigration to Oslo covers the four historical waves of Chinese immigration. Finally, Wanjiru's (2013) comparative study of migrant churches, including NCCC Oslo, concludes that religious communities are potential sources for integration via social capital. While these sources were helpful, I was unable to find any empirical research conducted on the Overseas Chinese in Norway in relation to their identity or sense of belonging. Thus, this study will contribute to this gap in research and intersects with several bodies of literature related to migration, globalization, sociology of religion and China.

## **Research Aim and Questions**

The main aim of the study is to perform a qualitative research investigation to better understand negotiation processes of identity and belonging of first-generation Chinese Christian immigrants, and the impact their religious beliefs have in these processes.

### *Clarifying Concepts*

I use the word ‘Chinese’ to refer to those who are ethnically related to China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau. Throughout the study, I refer to the Chinese diaspora as ‘Overseas Chinese.’ This is the English version of “huaqiao,” and means Chinese sojourners, or citizens of China residing overseas (Kwan 2013, 5). Tan Chee-Beng (2004, 2) argues instead for the label “ethnic Chinese,” so as not to assume that those abiding overseas still look at China as their homeland. While I agree that this term may be more appropriate, the label ‘Overseas Chinese’ was introduced to me by my participants, and thus I choose this address according to their own use of it. My unit of analysis is first-generation Chinese Christian immigrants, where “first-generation” refers to those who were born in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan or Macau and later migrated to Norway. I also use the terms ‘immigrant’ and ‘migrant’ interchangeably throughout the study. There has been no agreement on a single definition for the term ‘migrant’ although some distinguish ‘immigrants’ as those who intend to settle, while ‘migrants’ are only temporarily resident (Migration Observatory). However, it seems in public discussion and the research milieu that the terms are used interchangeably. They both refer to people who live temporarily or permanently within a country that he or she was not born, and has gained some significant personal or social ties to (UNESCO 2017).

### *Research Questions*

My main research problem was to understand how the members of the Nordic Chinese Christian Church of Stavanger (NCCC Stavanger) form their sense of identity and belonging in Norway, and what role, if any, their beliefs play in this formation. My three main sub-questions were as follows:

1. How do Chinese Christian immigrants negotiate their identities in a multicultural society like Norway?
2. How do they experience a sense of belonging as immigrants?
3. What role does the Chinese church and their Christian beliefs have in shaping their identities and sense of belonging?

### *Scope of the Study*

In relation to the influence of migrant beliefs, the research takes an approach related to the sociological study of religion and does not seek to conduct a theological investigation. While some historical background is provided for contextualization, neither does the study aim to perform a historical account of NCCC Stavanger nor Chinese immigration in Norway. Rather, it seeks to study experiences, values, and contemporary migrant identity. Moreover, due to time constraints, the investigation is a short, in-depth study with limited participant observation. Thus, the scope of the research is small and not representative of all the members of NCCC Stavanger nor all Chinese Christian immigrants.

### **Relevance of the Study**

More than a million migrants entered Europe in 2015 in what was known as the ‘refugee crisis’ (BBC 2016). This made immigration a relevant ‘hot topic’ as struggle and division was sparked as to how to handle increased migration. Some have advocated for an increased global commitment to protect refugees (Guterres 2017), while others have responded with anti-immigrant sentiments. A study by Statistics Norway (2016a) showed trends towards critical orientation and decreased contact with immigrants. IMO (Esipova et al. 2015, 1) also found that “European residents appear to be, on average, the most negative globally towards immigration, with the majority believing immigration levels should be decreased.” However, immigrants’ attitudes to Norway and living in Norway remain largely unknown (Østby and Henriksen 2013). Our attitudes towards others and categorizations of the world have a significant influence on our communication and behavior (Cristoffanini 2004, 80-81). Thus, I believe this study on immigrant identity and belonging may help improve understanding of migrant lives and experiences. Moreover, Kivisto (2014, 173) argues that further empirical investigation is needed for migrants who have a faith religion, which is seen as an important aspect of personal identity and can facilitate the process of incorporation. Hence, insights into migrant religion can be especially beneficial to better understand immigrants not only by numbers, but by their perspectives and values, which lie at the very core of who they are.

Academically, this study is relevant to immigration research in Norway. Because the Chinese are a rather small community, case studies have been dominated by the US and the UK. While this research is helpful, Europe and specifically Norway, is a separate context that needs to be further explored within immigration studies. This follows Roy and Starosta’s (2010, 11) view that we need context-sensitive approaches to human sciences to appreciate the uniqueness of individual cases. Moreover, due to the fast development of modern China,

there have been important changes in what it means to be ‘Chinese’ (Yang 1999, 56). Hence, this research will also contribute to contemporary Chinese studies.

## **Research Design**

To answer the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research investigation, which used a grounded theory approach to gather rich and deep data (Bryman 1999, 37-48). While some statistics have been used as secondary sources, the study is not quantitative and does not aim for generality or hard facts. Rather, as a phenomenological study on identity and belonging, the research recognizes the complexity and ever-changing nature of the variables studied and acknowledges variance within different contexts. By following an empirical approach with theory emerged from the data, it steers away from positivist approaches based on logic and theory testing (Okasha 2002, 79). The study is part of the social sciences and contributes to academic disciplines of anthropology, global studies, and sociology of religion.

## *Thesis Structure*

The first chapter of the thesis provides a general introduction and background to the study. The second chapter discusses the theoretical perspectives that frame the investigation including theories on transnationalism, belonging, and migrant religion. The third chapter deals with methodological approaches and issues in conducting the study. To present the main findings, the results, analysis and discussion have been organized together. Chapter four presents migration experiences and the context that impacts Chinese immigrants and their identity (re)construction. Chapter five analyzes the topic of belonging and the phenomenon of integration with ethnic preservation. Chapter six discusses the role of religion and the impact it has on migrant’s lives. In the final chapter, a summary and conclusion of the main findings is given along with some final reflections.

## Chapter Two

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Introduction**

To analyze Chinese Christian immigrants in Norway in relation to how they construct and negotiate their identity, I will discuss the notion of transnationalism. This concept is useful to describe contemporary migration where because of globalization and related developments in technology and communication, migrants can more easily sustain connections with their home countries, and yet settle and integrate within their host societies. This interaction with multiple societies shapes how immigrants form their identities, often negotiating different aspects of settlement and origin societies leading to a selective assimilation and what is termed “adhesive identities.” I will then discuss the concept of ‘belonging’ to analyze immigrants’ self-perception of their group and others’. Belonging also relates to integration and inclusion/exclusion, where I consider the phenomenon of multiplicity and complexities of belonging within a culturally and religiously pluralistic society. Finally, I will discuss the dynamics of migration and religion to understand the impact of religious belief on Chinese Christian immigrant experience and identity formation. I will discuss theories related to the transnational nature of religious communities and the connection of religious communities across borders, examining the way the ‘global’ nature of religion impacts immigrants. While these theoretical categories have been separated for purposes of analysis, they are not mutually exclusive and rather mirror the intricacy of migration, identity and belonging as they are interrelated and overlapping.

#### **Transnational Identity**

There are a variety of different definitions and uses of the term ‘transnationalism’ and it is fast becoming a popular term to describe the situation of contemporary migration (Sternberg 2009, 102). Because the concept has been stretched and used for different purposes, running the danger of ambiguity and obsolescence, there have been several attempts to narrow its meaning. Scholars have suggested differentiating between transnationalism from above versus transnationalism below (Smith and Guarnizo 1998), and have proposed a specification of various types of transnationalism (Khagram and Levitt 2007). However, I choose to use this term generally to capture the broad phenomenon of multiple ties and interactions linking



people or institutions across nation-state borders (Vertovec 2009, 1). “The collective attributes of such connections, their processes of formation and maintenance and their wider implications are referred to broadly as ‘transnationalism’” (Ibid., 3). These transnational links do not have to be limited to the ties between home and host societies but can also capture connections to other societies where co-ethnics live (Van Heer 2010, 37). However, it would be a mistake to assume that all immigrants are transnational or that all immigrants form the same transnational ties. Rather, we must keep in mind that transnational practices are very diverse between and within different migrant groups, varying according to different individual, communal, and environmental factors (Vertovec 2009, 78).

Cultural identity is also becoming a challenging issue in the social sciences as such an identity forms today within a pluralistic world. With an increase of global processes, comes an increasing awareness of individuals belonging to different societies, as well as social and cultural groups (Petkova 2005, 17-18). Intercultural competence studies have begun to argue for more nuanced approaches to culture, arguing against traditional essentialist views of culture as stable and homogeneous. Instead, they propose a move towards more process oriented or social constructivist approaches, with a postmodern view of deconstructing categories to capture an individual’s full range of being. Dahl (2008, 3-5) also proposes a dynamic concept of culture and identity. He sees identity not as something that exists by itself but as a relational concept where individual and collective identity is constructed in a dialogical process. Moreover, he understands cultural differences as dependent on one’s experience and interpretation of self and other. Thus, one’s culture is a continually changing framing of reference. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010, 2) also argue for an unbounded view of culture, focusing instead on the complexity of culture as a fluid and creative social force. They further believe that what people say about their own cultural identity should be read as an image they want to give, rather than evidence of a truly essentialist national culture (Ibid., 13). Indeed, “recognizing that essentialism can contain its own critique and contradictions leads one to search for a more flexible model of identity” (van Ziegert 2006, 77). Thus, cultural identity is not necessarily essentialist or a hybrid of two pure entities, but rather a back and forth dynamic of national and/or ethnic identity and multiplicity (Ibid., 77). Petkova (2005, 12) further explains the interdependence of individual and collective identity, claiming that an individual identity is built in relation to social surroundings and group belonging. She describes this complex cultural identity consisting of a diverse mix of personal loyalties, thus arguing that identity is both inherited and constantly changing.

The impact of globalization is also relevant here, and a concept that has become one of the defining terms of our age. Scholte (2005, 77) defines globalization as transplanetary and supraterritorial connections that allow us to be connected to people all over the world. While there have been different debates as to whether globalization can be considered a real and significant historical development or if it's merely popular discourse, both sceptics and globalists agree that there has been a major shift in the world (Held and McGrew 2007). This change has influenced identity formation and belonging as "the mono-cultural context inherited from previous eras is now being transformed into a multi-cultural and intercultural context of pluralism" (Petkova 2005, 23). Thus, globalization and the impact of developments in technology and communication have made transnationalism possible and policies of multiculturalism increasingly the norm. Therefore, Petkova (2005, 35) anticipates that transnational and local identities will increase in importance within the postmodern world of pluralism. This view defines identity as encompassing individual and collective influences and consisting of multiple allegiances, all of which are transforming under globalization (Ibid., 56). This also explains the increasingly transnational character of migrant identity and belonging as immigrants adapt to new geographic locations, social contexts, and competing allegiances.

### *Migrant Negotiation*

Thus, under the canopy of transnationalism and globalization it appears that migrants and their experiences of identity formation and belonging are far from simple or straightforward, but rather involve a complex process of negotiation. Kivisto (2014, 37-38) explains that a typical immigrant exhibits a voice, negotiating terms of incorporation into the host country and values, while picking and choosing aspects of their culture to maintain or abandon. Different factors and variables shape this migrant negotiation, including attributes of migrant capital such as education, work, age, gender; and attributes of the host society such as social relations and the economic climate. Kim (2015, 1) also takes an integrative approach in describing how "we are, indeed, in the throes of a worldwide integration of the world in which many facets of human affairs that used to be bounded by locality now play out on the world's stage, bringing cultural traditions together in an increasing interdependence." She explains that people struggle to make sense of life in the ever-present complexity of our world with its clashing traditions and identities. Yet despite such struggles, it appears that people do adapt to the stress of crossing cultures and craft their own creative way of being that transcends essentialist categories. Hence, many immigrants have displayed strength and

openness, transforming beyond national boundaries via the challenge of adapting in migration (Ibid., 1-2).

Within this process of migrant negotiation, identity can be seen as “constructions of being, belonging, and becoming” (Scholte 2005, 224). It may also involve a reorientation of what Bourdieu (in Schirato and Webb 2003, 140) described as “habitus.” The theory of habitus consists of three points to describe how one becomes the one they are. This includes the development of attitudes and perceptions, the way in which one engages in such practices, and the lasting inherited schemes of these perceptions and actions. Bourdieu describes that who we are depends on the social context that has informed our self-identity. Thus, the context where we live and move shapes what we become. This is why migrants, who are moving to new contexts and relating to new social fields, often experience a change in their sense of self, values and perceptions. This process of change can then lead to a ‘reorientation of habitus.’ Vertovec (2009, 83) describes this reorientation of habitus as a process of negotiation that involves a competent selection of actions in relation to local systems, which can contribute to wider recognition of multiple identities. Critics of the concept ‘habitus,’ wonder about the role of individual agency, which is largely ignored in this theory. This individual factor is better addressed within the theory of selective assimilation and adhesive identities.

### *Segmented Assimilation and Adhesive Identities*

Yang (1999, 162) describes how

“The construction of Chinese identity is a complex process for Chinese immigrants...because of the long history of Chinese civilization and its diverse cultural traditions, because of modern conflicts and divisions in Chinese society, and because of their migrating away from China. This is simultaneously a process of deconstruction and reconstruction.”

Segmented assimilation refers to the different integration paths for different immigrants, a selective acculturation process where learning ways of the host society combines with strong bonds of the ethnic community (Ibid., 26). In fact, this aligns with many theorists who argue that transnationalism does not necessarily oppose or undermine integration, but rather challenges the dominant view of equating integration and assimilation as processes that are necessary and/or inevitable (Sternberg 2009, 108). Kim (2015, 8) positively highlights intercultural transformation as a productive way of orienting oneself to an ever-changing world. She believes this intercultural blending of norms can be more constructive than the

common exclusivity to ethnic loyalty. Tariq Modood (2010, 50) further argues that multicultural policies and societies ought to have a foundation of celebrating difference rather than forcing people to conform to dominant norms. He argues for a multicultural accommodation rather than integration, which recognizes the social reality of new forms of belonging and complex identities that are increasingly characterizing the societies we live in (Ibid., 53).

Adhesive identities are described as the existence of both segmented assimilation and transnationalism, where immigrants attach certain forms of their new host identity to their existing ethnic identity, holding both simultaneously (Yang 1999, 27). This theory recognizes that people are members of multiple and overlapping groups, which mutually influence one another. Furthermore, Yang's (Ibid., 167-168) empirical research on Chinese Christians in America, revealed that the longer an immigrant stays in their host society the more apt they are to become involved with local issues and activities. Yet at the same time, they continue to remain proud of their cultural heritage and Chinese roots. Therefore, this idea of "adhesive identities" describes how immigrants tend to select the good elements and reject the bad from the different systems that they are part of, getting the best of both worlds (Ibid., 183). Thus, terms such as 'identity' and 'integration' are not as simple as they may seem to be, and particularly for the migrant, a process of identity construction and integration is dynamic and fluid. Moreover, the construction of adhesive identities can be seen as both necessary and made possible within the social context of multicultural society.

Concepts of transnationalism and migrant negotiation provide an important theoretical framework to understand Chinese Christian immigrants in Norway. It is vital to realize that their identities are influenced and shaped by their multiple ties and interactions within different contexts. Thus, rather than placing these immigrants in a box marked, "Chinese" or "Norwegian," they must be understood as an "in-between," consisting of a multiplicity of fluid identities. Yet particularly for Chinese Christians in Norway, it is interesting to examine how they reorient and/or reinforce certain aspects of their identity. In what ways do Overseas Chinese Christians in Norway hold on to traditional practices, customs or loyalties to China? In what ways do they negotiate or remove such ties; and how do their religious beliefs impact this process of negotiation and transformation?

## **Belonging**

The context of a pluralist, multicultural society like Norway influences not only migrant identity, but also their sense of belonging. The concept of 'belonging' can be described as an

emotional attachment, feeling “at home” or ‘safe’ (Anthias 2006, 2-3). A sense of belonging also refers to patterns of trust and confidence, and is related to areas such as citizenship, identities, culture, and traditions. Belonging also relates to boundary maintenance where ‘homogeneous’ communities attempt to mark uniqueness in order to create a sense of belonging (Monaghan and Just 2000, 92-94). Ethnic boundaries can be based off of a variety of shared experiences such as religion, customs, and language, and they tend to create a sense of unity and shared destiny. Yet belonging has several dimensions related to how we feel about our location within a social world, the relational nature of belonging, and experiences of inclusion/exclusion (Anthias 2006, 21). Thus, belonging is not limited to just citizenship or group membership, but by the social arenas they create and their impact on one’s sense of stability or of feeling part of a bigger whole of emotional and social bonds. Therefore, for one to belong is not just a question of identification or membership but of emotional attachments and shared values, relationships, and practices.

Levitt and Schiller (2004) also differentiate between ‘ways of being,’ as engaged social practices and relations that one may not necessarily identify with, versus ‘ways of belonging,’ where one belongs to a social field and expresses their membership to it through their actions. They describe how this engagement in relations and practices that cross borders, displays a ‘transnational way of being.’ When one recognizes and acts on these transnational elements of who they are, they express a ‘transnational belonging.’ Yet memories of home are not necessarily factual representations of a fixed past but are constructions that are fluid and set against one’s current positionality and conception of home. Thus, a sense of belonging relates to ‘home’ as both a geographic location and the *feeling* of being home. This means symbols of belonging can be both physical and metaphorical (Ghorashi 2003, 189 in Stock 2010, 24-25). This tendency for an immigrant to have some longing for their home society while attempting to belong in their host society, reveals the dynamics of belonging and the layeredness of the notion of ‘home.’

### *Multi-Sited Belonging*

While we tend to describe belonging in relation to groups and social places, the concept of intersectionality is important to bear in mind as a metaphor of crossroads and intermeshing (Anthias 2006, 26-27). Rather than intersections of people bound by a fixed group belonging, belonging constructed in an intersectional way relates to a range of boundaries such as class, gender, and religion. This shows that belonging which refers to a person’s position is multiply experienced. In this way, it is hard to construct someone in a uniform way, as

individuals relate to different dimensions of belonging. This aligns with the social anthropological view that people are not completely unique or autonomous. Rather, they derive parts of their identity from various group belongings, as human behavior is seen as part of our membership in a social species (Monaghan and Just 2000, 54). The experience of many transnational migrants is also this multiplicity of belonging. Vertovec (2009, 142) elaborates on this thought when he explains that some immigrants may still regard their land of origin as 'home,' and others may identify with the host land. However, many actually tend to have multiple, co-existing and often overlapping homes and identities.

Due to globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many have adopted more liberal perspectives on national belonging (Tan Chee-Beng 2011, 18). Many feel it is okay to belong to one or two, or even multiple countries. Thus, it seems a natural change of perception is occurring about citizenship and belonging, arising out of globalization and transnational living. Furthermore, Marshall-Fratani (2001, 84) describes how the deterritorialization of culture via migration leads to delocalization of identity and community formation. This leads to an explosion of multiple identities and belonging, alongside an erosion of state power, which allows people to personally choose how they will inscribe themselves in a new vision of modernity. Therefore, we can see that a sense of 'home' and/or belonging can refer to both a physical place and a symbolic emotion of where one feels one belongs (Stock 2010, 26-27). This paradoxical experience of belonging both 'here and there' challenges notions of nation, ethnicity, and origin. This can also lead to new understandings of belonging and identity that are fluid, and a negotiation of in-betweenness, of belonging nowhere. Hence, the concept of 'home' and a sense of belonging is an aspect of transnational migration that is highly contextual, and refers to multiple places and spaces at different times and in different ways.

### *Transworld Belonging*

Despite some reactive nationalism, transworld national identities and non-territorial identities are ever-present in modern society (Scholte 2005, 235; 244). Transworld national identities are non-territorial attributes that link people across the globe, such as a shared faith, class, and gender. This creates multi-faceted identities and poses a challenge, particularly to immigrants, who must blend various conflicting modes of being and belonging. Within such chaos, people are beginning to search for solid foundations and the meaning of life. Scholte describes religion as a major non-territorial identity, and notes a trend of increasing transworld religious belonging (Ibid., 244). Indeed, it appears that transnationalism is starting to form a new context of the world, where the nation-state does not necessarily constitute the

primary physical and ideological backdrop in which identity and community are formed (Marshall-Fratani 2001, 81). This is important because it gives back to the sacred and religious realm a renewed significance and social function. Day (2011, 203) furthers this thought when she explains that those with a theocentric orientation and belief in God whom they have an emotional and reciprocal relationship, have shown a more connected sense of belonging.

This supports the idea that religion helps people experience belonging and differentiate between what is well known or to be avoided (Henriksen 2017, 22). It also helps provide a specific focus for engaging with the world. Many people ‘believe in belonging’ and accept religious identities as a complement to other belongings (Day 2011, 192-194). In fact, a longing for belonging of ‘this world’ and an ‘other world’ exemplifies how beliefs of a supernatural nature can actually manifest in temporal and social ways. This leads to the argument against individualism being the dominant quality of late modernity. Rather, many are found to hold beliefs that are centered and guided by community; and which carry a common theme of belonging to mutual, emotional and legitimate relationships (Ibid., 204).

The concept of belonging, and its increasingly transnational nature, is an important theoretical backdrop for understanding aspects of immigration, and buzzwords such as identity, acculturation, multiculturalism, and belonging. It is interesting to see that many Chinese are proud of their origins, history, and tradition (Ben-Rafael 2009, 667). It seems these feelings of belonging to something common may persist even if one’s homeland isn’t where one feels most “home.” This confirms a two-fold heterogeneization of transnationalism, with society on one hand and with immigrant communities on the other. Particularly in the case for Chinese Christians, I wonder how their religious beliefs are valued, practiced, and integrated into other parts of their social lives. It is important to look at the uniqueness of their sense of belonging in Norway and with other Overseas Chinese Christians. How do these areas interplay and influence one another? Is there a particular priority given to one aspect of belonging over another? In any case, it appears that transworld belonging, such as religion, can play an important function in the lives of transnational migrants, particularly as belonging is found to be a vital aspect of how individuals orient themselves in the world (Henriksen 2017, 92).

## **Migration and Religion**

“A sense of identity is a basic anthropological need, which it is religion’s prime function to satisfy” (Mol 1976 in Henriksen 2017, 95). Theorists in social anthropology also claim that belief systems help people to deal with the fundamental problems of life, providing ideas to how and why the world is put together (Monaghan and Just 2000, 124). Moreover, the migration experience itself can intensify spiritual needs, which Kivisto (2014, 29) describes as “the quest for meaning and certainty in a confusing world of rapid social change.” Some may wonder why new converts are attracted to once-foreign religious beliefs. It appears that it is not primarily for material or social advantage but is the confusion within a pluralistic, relativistic world, which leads people to search for alternative meaning systems (Ibid., 28-29). Conservative Christianity can provide an answer to this search as it asserts a sole and absolute truth only found in the inerrant Bible (Yang 1999, 94), where the Christian church helps to maintain a distinctive value system (Ibid; 116). The contextual dimension for increasing religious identity can also be seen as a reaction to globalization, where people turn to religion for social comfort and stable community within periods of social and economic crises (Petkova 2005, 49-50). Many are also opposed to modernism’s promotion of materialism, individualism and secularism as the main values of life.

Therefore, religion is found to serve an important role in migrants’ lives in a variety of ways. Religious beliefs and membership can act as an identity marker within a new context, can give life meaning, and be a resource in adjusting (Schreiter 2009 in Frederiks 2015, 187). Evangelical Protestantism, in particular, has been used as a tool to sharpen how to orient oneself in relation to others, acting as a system of meaning that covers the whole of life (Henriksen 2017, 87-90). Moreover, religion is found to be deeper than material and social capital, carrying with it a notion of sacrality, a setting apart from the ordinary. Thus, one key element of religion is that it helps to explain the inexplicable and give life meaning. Indeed, Connor (2012, 130 in Kivisto 2014, 56) agrees that “religion has [a] unique relationship with immigrant well-being.” In fact, some even suggest that a religious commitment becomes stronger if one’s faith expects conformity to values and obligations for strong community (Hirschman 2004, 1228).

It appears then, that certainty of religious precepts can act as an anchor. Religious beliefs and practices can help stabilize immigrants as they adapt and struggle, and confront the question of “who am I?” in a new society (Herberg 1960, 12 in Hirschman 2004, 1211). Yet the answers to such questions are found to be most meaningful in familiar linguistic and



cultural contexts. This may explain why many immigrants are drawn to the fellowship of ethnic churches where relationships are enforced by traditional food and customs (Ibid., 1208). However, the freedom to have ethnic churches and observe religious beliefs is only made possible through recognition of religious diversity and respect. Religiously plural societies make space for “religious participation and rituals [that] can often fill the psychological void and create a sense of belonging and community for newcomers” (Ibid., 1228). For many migrants, aspects of ethnicity, religion, and culture are deeply embedded and intertwined. Each of these areas often play a key role in different areas of their lives, and are continually changing according to a range of influences, both locally and globally.

### *Transnationalization of Religious Life*

Peggy Levitt (2007b) describes how nations, immigration and religion collide with globalization bringing a new task for many to fit contradictory loyalties and cultural expectations with religion. She coins this the ‘transnationalization of religious life’ where one must think outside of the nation-state to understand religion and migration, which is transnational. This transnationalization can be seen when migrants themselves influence religion as they combine different religious elements and cross borders. Phan and Tan (2013, 232) also argue that immigrants create a completely alternative religious life, different from the Christianity of both their host and home societies. Thus, ethnic churches can be characterized by transnational qualities that transcend nation-state boundaries. Indeed, religious institutions that immigrants build and adapt can become worlds in and of themselves, where unique relations are created among members of the community (Warner 1998, 3 in Vertovec 2009, 141). This can lead to the feeling of the church as an extended family.

Especially for convert groups, their local religious community may help to uphold ethnic culture and identity (Yang 1999, 31). For example, the ethnic church may forge bonds of spiritual connections of a universal nature, while still celebrating cultural traditions and upholding an ethnic identity that unites them. Many new immigrant churches begin humbly through borrowed spaces or renting part of a church building (Hirschman 2004, 1206-1211). Yet they bring new forms of content and language to services that personalize and strengthen their beliefs. This attests to the presence of more than eight hundred Chinese protestant churches in the United States in 2000. Moreover, it supports the claim that hearing prayer in one’s mother tongue provides a strong emotional connection that is strengthened even further when shared with others. This shows the transnational nature of Christianity, which is not

imported as a package but revealed according to one's own culture (Kim and Kim 2008, 16). It also supports the idea that there is a complex interplay of different factors that influence religious identity and practice in migration, with religion playing a special role to create and sustain transnational ties (Levitt 2004, 6). This diversity is 'transnationalism from below' or can be seen in what Levitt (Ibid., 10) describes as "negotiated transnational churches [that] arise from a set of personal and institutional relationships that emerge organically, in response to the challenges posed by a particular context."

### *Transnationalization of Religious Experience*

Immigrants practicing their religion in their host country can influence those back home, and religious groups connected all over the world embody transnational belonging and its impact across borders. Levitt (2007b, 114) claims that "if transnational belonging is the wave of the future, religion is likely to be its principle stage." She also argues that multiple loyalties do not have to be a cause of worry. Rather, transnational religious interdependence can create an opportunity of building bridges across cultures. Such an experience can positively affect connected countries by contributing to safer communities and better systems. Thus, transnationalism reshapes the concept that the prime place religious communities interact is the local landscape, as relationships between religious groups increase all over the world (Frederiks 2015, 192). Yet despite this increase in interaction, there continues to be segregation of Christian church communities. Apparently, many immigrants struggle to feel at home in local mainline churches, agreeing that "If you cannot pray in your mother tongue, it just doesn't feel right" (Währisch-Oblau 2009, 308 in Frederiks 2015, 196). This displays the dynamic Christian shift from particularism to universalism, where cultural identity is increasing while political identity is decreasing (Yang 1999, 171-173). Thus, Christian immigrants tend to move towards a religious identity that transcends political and racial identities, and which is marked by diverse cultural identities that bring unity through complementarity. This exemplifies that religious universality and particularity are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the time-space compression of globalization does not cater to simplistic categories, but instead involves an interplay of the global and local, universal and particular (Vasquez 2010, 131). This relates to the concept of Christianity as a global religion characterized by both internal diversity and global vision.

### *Global Religion*

Christianity as a world religion has spread through evangelism, migration and globalizing processes (Kim and Kim 2008, 5). As these processes increase, an awareness of global religious identities is also increasing, with a growing consciousness of belonging to a world community (Vertovec 2009 148; 153). Religion can be especially unique for the migrant as it speaks to his/her experience and results in an increase in conservative belief and religious fervor. With the growing spread of migration and global connectedness, there is a new sense of a collective consciousness that has helped unite Christians across the globe. Thus, as globalization continues to increase we may observe a shift in identity away from the nation-state and more towards religion.

On the other hand, some predict that religious identity is, and will continue to be, influenced by a combination of global and local forces (Drønen 2013, 19-22). In this case, a 'global history' might look at slow globalization processes that have moved societies to a greater common understanding of humanity, and reveal religion as a globalizing force that works within both slow and rapid paradigms (Ibid., 23-24). Thus, religion may be seen as a form of "grassroots globalization." In fact, Christianity may have historically always been this way, as there has never been a point in history where Christianity has been a religion of only one people group (Kim and Kim 2008, 5). Rather, this world religion has always been geographically widespread and practiced in different communities. Therefore, contemporary world Christianity can be seen as both an agent of globalization and also a product of it, being spread at the grassroots level (Ibid., 13). Translation work reiterates the internal diversity of Christianity. Sanneh (2003, 130) believes that translation of the Bible into local languages broke the western domestication of Christianity and helped create movements of resurgence that transformed the religion into a world faith. This explains the strong global flows of Christianity and its continued influence across the world (Kim and Kim 2008, 211-212).

Thus, Christianity is a people movement developed from personal contacts, formation of communities and migration. Despite the obvious diversity created through such a spread, there remain global meeting points including the celebration of communion, the Holy Bible, the Holy Spirit, and global mission (Kim and Kim 2008, 219-222). Despite diverse views within these categories, world missions in particular can be seen as a major 'global' quality of Christianity. The "Great Commission" in Matthew 28 of the Bible unleashes the command for Christians to go and make disciples, or followers of Jesus, in all nations. Indeed, some believe that "one key criterion of an adequate theology of mission would be whether it is able

to speak to the physical and social needs of humanity” (Yung 1997, 65). Sanneh (2008, 72) describes that the foundation of the Christian gospel can be understood as having a focus on freedom, solidarity and reconciliation. So, Christian expansion is not strict theology or denominations but a growing historical consciousness of God who is alive in history in specific languages, cultures and customs. Therefore, it is a ‘global religion’ in the sense that the world is becoming one, not from becoming the same, but rather in celebrating difference when it is no longer remote. Hence the answer to the question: “Who’s religion is Christianity?” may be seen as a global phenomenon, transcending nation-state boundaries and social barriers as a religion for all people, in all the world.

It is necessary to highlight theories related to religion and migration as Chinese Christians are part of complex and interwoven dynamics of migration, religion, and diverse social systems that impact their daily lives. For the Chinese Christian immigrant, it appears that the church and their religious beliefs play a very important role in their lives. Yet, to what extent do such beliefs impact their identity and belonging as immigrants in Norway, and how might their religious priorities impact local and global contexts?

## Chapter Three

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Design**

Ethnographic research is described as the combination of empirical study and theoretical interpretation of culture and society (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 1). Within this study, I applied qualitative research methods including semi-structured interviews and participant observation to investigate the lives of Chinese Christian immigrants in Norway. I also used secondary sources such as literature and statistics for theoretical insights and contextualization, as I saw the benefit of using a combination of methods. However, I focused on qualitative research methods to gather rich and deep data in order to understand social processes (Bryman 1999, 49) and to try and get a ‘look behind the scenes’ (Goffman 1971) of my participants’ lives and values.

I chose grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006) as a method to collect data for the phenomenological study of immigrant identity and belonging. “Used well, grounded theory quickens the speed of gaining a clear focus on what is happening in your data without sacrificing the detail of enacted scenes” (Charmaz 2006, 14). I chose a grounded theory approach as a qualitative research method as I wanted to try and allow the participants to tell their own story. I was cautious of the potential danger of analysis that disengages from reality in order to prove particular theories (Geertz 1973, 30). Hence, I preferred an approach that drew theory from the data, allowing for flexibility throughout the study with openness to change according to emergent findings.

However, there are both advantages and disadvantages of the grounded theory approach. One critique is that grounded theory is quite risky, where researchers may expect a theory to magically appear by following the rules of the method (Goulding 2002, 157). I addressed this concern by identifying key research questions, collecting data to answer these questions, and exploring literature for theoretical insights. However, this did not make the meaning of the data instantly clear. Glaser (1978 in Goulding 2002, 158) describes the ‘drugless trip’ as the period when researchers panic as they struggle to locate meaningful themes from open coding. Despite this frustration, I believe grounded theory was appropriate for my research question as it encouraged asking emergent critical questions, and prompted deep reflexivity within the continual evaluation of data and analysis (Charmaz 2017).

## Sampling

My participant sampling focused on the Chinese Christian immigrants who attend the Nordic Chinese Christian church in Stavanger. I chose to interview first generation immigrants, because I was most interested to learn about the process of identity and integration of those who moved from their home country to a completely different society and setting. I recruited participants who were diverse in terms of their background, age, and occupation. It proved difficult to gather male participants, but this was also representative of the demographics of the congregation, which is female-dominant. Though this study does not aim to generalize, the selection of participants is important and requires a researcher to use good judgement under the circumstances of the field they are entering (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 108). Thus, I tried to get a diverse sampling of participants to better understand the nuances and variances of identity formation and belonging within the church.

| Pseudonym     | Age | Gender | Hometown       | Job                               | Education                   | Years in Norway |
|---------------|-----|--------|----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Karen</b>  | 61  | Female | Hong Kong      | Unemployed (previously: catering) | High School in China        | 25              |
| <b>Joy</b>    | 45  | Female | Shenzhen       | Norwegian supermarket             | Professional School         | 23              |
| <b>Åse</b>    | 48  | Female | Shenzhen       | Chinese takeaway                  | Norwegian High School       | 19              |
| <b>Pamela</b> | 45  | Female | Hong Kong      | Manager of Norwegian food shop    | Nursing                     | 21              |
| <b>Timmy</b>  | 50  | Male   | Hong Kong      | Cook                              | Culinary                    | 27              |
| <b>Mingyu</b> | 23  | Female | Northern China | Student                           | Bachelor's Degree in Norway | 5               |
| <b>Dan</b>    | 59  | Male   | Macau          | Cook                              | Elementary Diploma          | 10              |
| <b>Jane</b>   | 33  | Female | Northern China | Restaurant Manager                | Partial Norwegian pedagogy  | 14              |
| <b>Lijuan</b> | 29  | Female | Central China  | Student                           | Master's Degree in Norway   | 3               |

*Table 1 Participant Demographics*

## **Access to the Field**

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 50) describe how there can be various routes of achieving access and that judgment should be exercised in determining the possibility, advantages and disadvantages. I first visited NCCC Stavanger to ‘case’ a possible research site (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 29), explore the feasibility of conducting a study on the church, and to make initial contact with the pastor. This provided information for a potential research setting, and helped develop and refine my research problem. My first contact was made through a message to the main church e-mail address, which I located on the church website. Later on my second visit, I discussed the project with Pastor Yeung in order to gain access to the field. Yang (1999, 11) describes how Chinese pastors tend to be protective of their churches, making it hard for an outsider to gain their trust and access. I had to discern how much to disclose, but I chose transparency as I did not see that covert research would be beneficial. Thus, I sent Pastor Yeung a short description of the project which outlined the purpose of the study<sup>3</sup>.

I was aware of the possible disadvantages of using the pastor as a gatekeeper, and the influence that may have had on my research. For example, Pastor Yeung may have chosen those who he considered could contribute to the study in a positive way. To try and address this concern, I did ask him how he selected those who he referred me to. He answered that he simply chose those who were first generation, which had been clarified as those who were born in Hong Kong or China and later moved to Norway. Yet I remained aware of how, especially as an outsider, I had to continuously discern my relationship with my gatekeeper, so not to be viewed with certain expectations or assigned a particular role that might hinder retrieval of data or correct insights (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 59). In this case, it helped to also explicitly discuss the project description with my participants (Ibid., 61) to avoid and/or re-direct wrong expectations.

Despite these potential pitfalls, I believe having Pastor Yeung as a gatekeeper had several important advantages. Firstly, I would have been unable to contact those who only spoke Chinese; and secondly, because of the short timeframe of the study, it would have been difficult to connect with a diverse sampling of participants. I also believe that many were much more comfortable and willing to talk with me after the study had been explained from someone who they knew and trusted. Thus, Pastor Yeung proved to be a tremendous help and provided me with a list of ten contacts who were willing to participate. To try to balance the

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<sup>3</sup> The information letter that I provided Pastor Yeung is in the Appendix. Throughout the project period the title has been slightly changed.

weight of his selection, I decided to choose only six of the list he provided; and personally selected three participants who I met through visits to the church.

### **Data Collection Method**

To answer my research questions regarding immigrant identity and belonging, I used a combination of qualitative research methods. I will discuss the methods that I used below, including particularities and the reasons I chose them.

#### *Semi-Structured Interview*

I chose to conduct intensive, semi-structured interviews to allow for greater depth of data but with some guidance for conversation. Charmaz (2006, 25) describes how “intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry.” Kvale and Brinkman (2015, 14) also see the value of conducting a smaller study, which caters to greater insight rather than mere generalization. I did consider the narrative approach to interviewing, but based on previous experience interviewing Chinese, I believed some structure would be helpful. Thus, I conducted eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews with nine participants. For one of the interviews, I talked with two participants who insisted to meet together as a married couple. I also held a separate meeting with Pastor Yeung and his wife where we discussed church history and demographics. The interviews ranged in length from one to three hours, with the majority lasting about one and a half hours.

I realized that the setting of the interviews should be selected according to foreshadowed problems, as the nature of the setting may shape the development of the research study (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 28). Thus, I conducted six out of the eight interviews within my personal home. I considered the pitfalls of this setting, for example, potential power differences or discomfort in an unfamiliar setting. However, I felt this option was best as it ensured a quiet setting without distraction, was a central location, and allowed for a relaxed atmosphere that catered to retrieval of rich data. These advantages were confirmed with the two other interviews, which were conducted within a glass room at the central library. These interviews were interrupted several times by background noise and were much less comfortable. Within the interviews, I also offered tea and coffee and had a plate of biscuits and water set out on the table to try and create a welcoming environment. I was aware that “where the ethnographer has had little or no previous contact with the person being interviewed, the task of building rapport is particularly important (Hammersley and



Atkinson 2007, 109). I believe these small acts were appreciated, though the majority of my participants were quite reserved in taking anything.

### *Participant Observation*

“There are distinct advantages in combining participant observation with interviews; in particular, the data from each can be used to illuminate the other” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 102). With this in mind, I conducted participant observation at NCCC Stavanger. The main purpose of the participant observation was for contextualization, to understand more of what was said within the interview, and to try and gain insights into the lifeworld of my participants. I define this as “participant” observation, because I did not act as a mere observer but tried to participate where I could. For example, I said the Lord’s Prayer in English while the congregation said it in Chinese, I partook in Communion, and sang when lyrics in English or Norwegian were provided. On one occasion, I was even able to follow some of the sermon as the pastor wrote notes for me in English to participate. Hammersley and Atkinson (Ibid., 85) describe how most researchers are poised somewhere in-between complete observer and complete participant.

My participant observation consisted of four visits to Sunday services over the span of eight months. This allowed for a combination of planned and spontaneous visits, which helped to capture a sampling of time that included both the routine and the extraordinary (Ibid., 37). Within my first visit to ‘case’ a possible research site (Ibid., 29), I attended the service with my Norwegian husband where we both stuck out quite easily and were introduced as visitors to the congregation. Afterwards, one man joked with us that we must be “soon-to-be missionaries.” This reflected the conceptualization process that occurs on both sides as both researcher and participants constantly attempt to interpret and predict each other (Briggs 1986, 40). My second visit was spontaneous as I attended the church during the Chinese New Year. On this occasion, I was looked at with some confusion and suspicion, as people began to ask me whether I was half-Chinese or spoke Chinese. I was invited by the pastor for my third visit to connect with my participants. I had made some former contact through e-mail and the pastor made an announcement to encourage the participants to approach me. So by this point, most of the church members knew my position and my purpose for being there. My final visit was for purse observation, as I sat in the back and took in-depth notes of the service and atmosphere. On this fourth occasion, while I was still treated as a guest, I was approached by the participants and felt I had built rapport and established relationships within the community. These visits helped to gain a backstage look of the

Chinese church and participants' lives (Goffman 1971). However, due to language barrier and time constraints I have chosen to focus this study on empirical data compiled within the interviews. Thus, in-depth detail of my participant observation will not be included.

### *Secondary Data*

In addition to interviews and participant observation, I did attempt to incorporate some document and literary analysis. I requested church documents in my meeting with the pastor and his wife, however, due to the language barrier and time constraints for document translation, this could not be a substantial contribution to my fieldwork. I conducted some analysis of a google-translation of the church website to look for major themes, church activities, and photos of church events. I believe this helped to contextualize my study, but I had to keep in mind the meta-communicative quality of the church website as a social construction and particular form of communication and presentation (Markham 2011, 122). Thus, the material from the website may not be fully reliable; so I have chosen to use it as a secondary source together with interviews and participant observation. To counteract threats to validity, I triangulated participant accounts with different types of data (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 188) including secondary sources of academic literature. Therefore, during my fieldwork, I read Kvisto's *Religion and Immigration* (2014), as well as Fenggang Yang's *Chinese Christians in America* (1999). This helped to have background knowledge and theories in mind for analytical leads and insights. I also utilized ssb.no for relevant statistics on topics such as immigration, local sentiments toward immigrants, and migration trends.

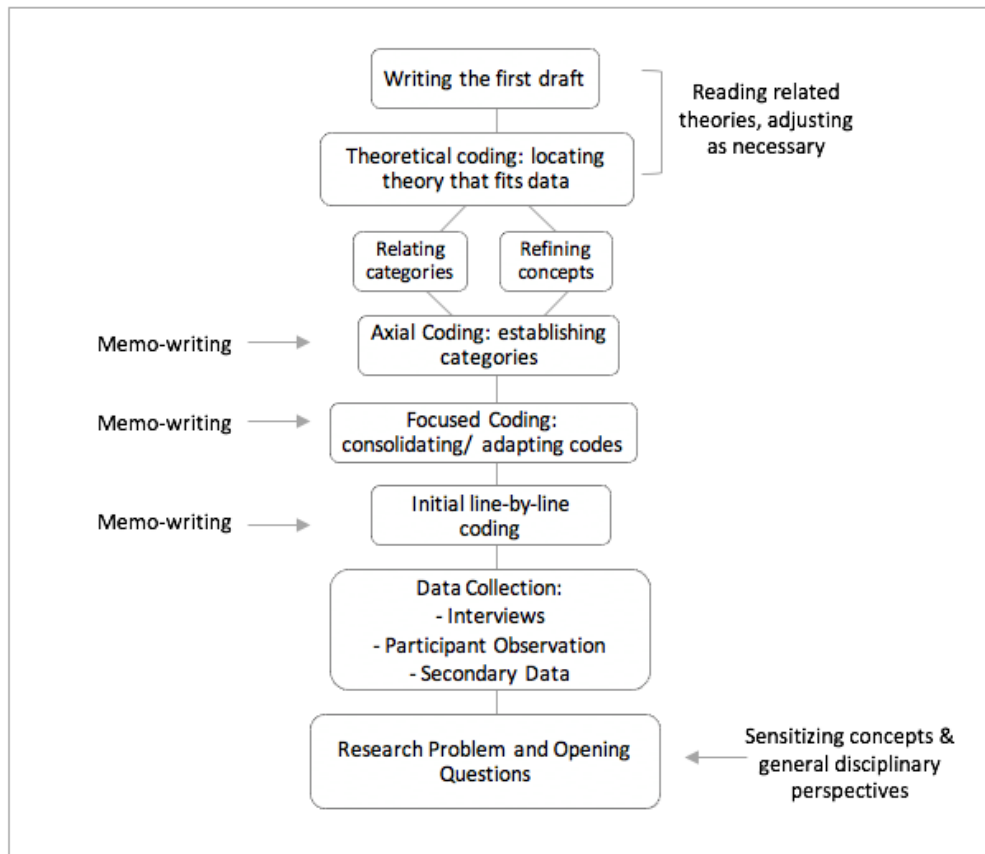
### **Data Collection Process**

My interviews were my primary source of data, and were organized under a sequence of themes with some questions used for guidance (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015, 150). However, the sequence and questions were open to change according to the answers given and the stories told. In this way, I organized my interviews in relation to my main research problem including four themes on experiences, identity, belonging, and religion. While these themes helped to structure the interview, they are interrelated and overlapping. I utilized a variety of interview questions including broad questions to open with, specifying and follow-up questions, and structuring questions (Ibid., 65). I also adapted questions throughout the fieldwork, for example, removing or re-wording questions that were often misunderstood. Research sub-questions were also adapted in light of emerging data in order to be more precise and related to developing themes.

I recorded my interviews and transcribed them word-for-word about a day or two after the interview took place. There was only one instance when the recorder was not on for half of the interview. On this occasion, I transcribed immediately after the interview and followed up to check validity. After all of the interviews, I wrote notes on the interaction and conversation. This designated time post-interview is said to be of great value in order to reflect on details such as emotional tone, nonverbal expressions, and personal feelings (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015 102). Though my research aimed to deduce theories from the data, I followed Kvale and Brinkmann's (Ibid., 131) advice to formulate research questions from a theoretical framework. Thus, following the grounded theory approach, I used sensitizing concepts in my main problem to help create ideas and remain sensitive towards questions related to my topic (Charmaz 2006, 3). These interests and general hypotheses included theories related to hybridization, diaspora, and migrant religion. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 166) also encourage this theoretical triangulation to approach data with multiple perspectives in mind.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed my data using a grounded theory approach, mostly based on Charmaz (2006). I also followed Silverman's (2011, 110-111) advice to get down to analysis as soon as possible. Transcribing the recordings in full allowed for easier analytical evaluation of translated interviews; and helped to have a smoother back-and-forth movement between data, memos, and theory (Silverman 2011, 123). For analysis, I began with initial line-by-line open coding (Charmaz 2006, 42-70), and then moved onto focused coding to consolidate and adapt codes. Charmaz (Ibid., 59) points out that "the strength of grounded coding derives from this concentrated, active involvement in the process. You act upon your data rather than passively read them." I then created a coding paradigm to establish categories that located core phenomenon. This stage of axial coding is derived from Strauss and Corbin's (2015) strategy to bring fragmented data back into a whole. This led to the final stage of theoretical coding, inspired by Glaser (1978, 72), where I related the categories and then filtered these hypotheses into an overarching theory that included all of the data. I wrote memos throughout this analytical process, which helped to think of new ideas and locate emerging insights. This physical act of putting ideas onto paper helped make the work more concrete and manageable (Charmaz 2006, 72).



*Figure 1 Process of Analysis, Inspired by Charmaz (2006)*

## Researcher Role

“Every researcher holds preconceptions that influence, but may not determine, what we attend to and how we make sense of it” (Charmaz 2006, 67). With this understanding, as a researcher I recognize that my own role in the field, personal attributes, and socio-historical background has an influence on the data. As a young, American girl, who is also an immigrant and a Christian but an outsider to the community, I had to realize my positionality and locate the best possible working identity. I negotiated my researcher role from the very beginning. Within the first message I sent to the church e-mail address, I explained that I was a student, interested in the Chinese, and a fellow ‘believer.’ It proved advantageous to negotiate my role as a Christian as I felt the members were more helpful knowing I was a ‘sister’ in Christ. Thus, I was coined “sister Sarah” from the very start.

Apart from this, I was also conscious throughout my fieldwork of my image as a researcher and impression management. Before every visit or interview, I took time to discern what clothes to wear and how to present myself. For example, during my visit for the Chinese New Year, I wore a red scarf as red signals ‘happiness’ and is commonly worn for

Chinese celebrations. Hammersley and Atkinson (Ibid., 66) describe how clothes can create impressions of what your position is, and can either create unity with your participants or set you apart as a researcher. Yet, I was also aware of the double role I had to play as I attempted to balance awareness of my own cultural background, my aims as a researcher, and the lifeworld of my participants (Briggs 1986, 422). The importance of reflexivity played into this balance as I reflected on my own perspectives as an American and a Christian, and tried to understand the thoughts and values of my participants.

### *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity is an aspect of all social research, where we must test personal assumptions and try to discover the taken-for-granted knowledge of our participants. Practicing reflexivity means respecting participants as well. This can be seen in an “I-thou” relationship, which refers to a true dialogical relationship between researcher and participant (Gadamer 1989 in Roy and Starosta 2001, 10). This avoids objectifying participants for research purposes and involves a genuine dialogue to develop a shared understanding. Gadamer (1989, 306) conceptualizes this as a fusion of horizons, where communication between two people is characterized by mutuality and honesty. My previous connection and love for the Chinese made me hyper aware of the reality of objectifying participants, and thus practicing reflexivity and trying to genuinely understand was a priority throughout the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

“Our respect for our research participants pervades how we collect data and shapes the content of our data. We demonstrate our respect by making concerted efforts to learn about their views and actions and to try to understand their lives from their perspectives” (Charmaz 2006, 19). There were several ethical reflections that I made within my research study as I handled sensitive and vulnerable information related to personal experiences and religious beliefs. Before I began my study, I received approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Service Department (NSD). I ensured that all data collected was kept private and confidential, and obtained verbal consent from all of my participants before the interview started. To secure protection of data, I uploaded all of the recordings to a secure online folder and anonymized all contact information, with a key of personally identifiable information stored separately in a personal notebook. I also clarified to the translator the importance of confidentiality.

Despite the ethical challenges of being an outsider to the community, I sought to empower the individual being interviewed so that they got something out of the experience, making the project mutually beneficial (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 217). I realized the vulnerability of the questions when one of my participants started to cry while he/she told his/her story of conversion to Christianity. This was within the very first interview and helped strengthen my commitment to respect my participants and protect their dignity, freedom, privacy, and values (NESH Guidelines). Due to the fact that the community is so small, I have also been conscious of the traceability of the participants' personal information. Pastor Yeung approved to be addressed as such throughout the publication. However, to ensure anonymity of the participants, all of the quotes have been changed to English with slight grammatical edits to help protect those whose language proficiency may give away their identity. While these adjustments have been made to protect the participants' personal information, none of the content of the quotes has been changed. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 228) point out that in daily life these types of ethical issues come up against similar uncertainties, but all that can be required of researchers "is that they take due note of the ethical aspects of their work and make the best adjustments they can in the circumstances."

## **Limitations and Validity**

### *Insider-Outsider Perspective*

While I am an outsider to NCCC Stavanger and the Chinese community, I also hold somewhat of a middle ground as an 'insider' to Christianity. Thus, I had to fight temptations to make assumptions based off of my familiarity with Christian beliefs and values. I also had to remain aware of my personal bias and avoid expressing my own opinions, whether of agreement or disagreement, particularly within matters of faith. Also, as an outsider with time restraints, I was unable to see all the facets and contexts of my participants' lives. Indeed, one may never fully understand the different behaviors, routines, and values of their participants. Moreover, interviews in and of themselves can be seen as a form of meta-communication, which is speech within a particular social situation (Drønen 2006, 4). Thus, the structure of the interview itself and positioning of the researcher versus the participant may hinder the ability to notice context-sensitive influences. Especially for the researcher who is an outsider, this may lead to a misinterpretation of meaning as they face differences within communicative norms. Thus, as an outsider and an insider, I had to consider my scope of research and its limitations.

### *Translation*

My interviews were linguistically diverse. I gained access to a translator through the help of my gatekeeper, who translated three of my interviews from Cantonese to English. I used a personal translator for two interviews from Norwegian to English. On my own, I conducted one interview in Norwegian and English, and two interviews in English. There were difficulties that came with having such language diversity. The participants who interviewed in Norwegian sometimes struggled to get their meaning across and were hard to understand at times. For those who used a translator from Cantonese, it was difficult to discern how much influence the translator had on what they said. Yet I did my best to follow up with specifying and clarifying questions throughout the interviews to try and avoid misunderstandings. I also discussed with my translator beforehand how he/she would translate the interview, agreeing that translation would be done as first-person paraphrase for coherence. However, I recognize the limitations of the language barrier including particular meanings and metaphors that people live by (Lakoff and Johnson 2003), and which can be lost in translation. Despite these circumstances, I did my best to learn about my participant's worlds and backgrounds through actively listening and seeking to understand.

### *Reliability*

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, 102) claim that there is no such thing as pure data without bias. Rather, researchers must discover the best way of collecting and analyzing data in a way that preserves validity and professionalism. Indeed, Kirk and Miller (1986, 71) further describe that the workings of all scientific endeavors involve an appreciation of its objectivity. Thus, "a piece of qualitative research is evaluated in terms of the reliability and validity of its observation on culture" (Ibid., 71). Social science has relied on a variety of methods and techniques that attempt to assure this reliability. "In order to make findings relevant, qualitative researchers must accept the goal of objectivity, and realize the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the ethnographic tradition" (Kirk and Miller 1986, 70). While perfect validity is impossible, reliability can be achieved when a researcher properly documents procedures for data collection and analysis (Ibid., 71). This acknowledges that explanation is asymmetric (Okasha 2002, 48). For example, just because x explains y, does not necessarily mean that y explains x. Hence, a proper explanation for a phenomenon should include information relevant to the phenomenon's occurrence, such as context and variables. While qualitative research faces challenges of interpretation and validity related to the ability

to locate similar results, a commitment to objectivity, ethics and integrity, and professional research standards will ensure the reliability of the data and its findings.



## Chapter Four

### MIGRATION EXPERIENCES: “*WE ARE IMMIGRANTS NOW*”

#### Introduction

To understand the migration experience of Chinese Christian immigrants and processes of identity construction and belonging, we must first realize that they are part of particular social structures, migrant networks and individual histories. In this chapter, I will consider the migration experience in relation to reasons for migration, struggles that have shaped settlement, and processes of acculturation and reorientation within a new society. I believe this backdrop is important to consider to make sense of historical, personal and contextual processes, which lead Chinese immigrants to negotiate and reconstruct their identities and sense of belonging.

#### Reasons for Migration: The Catering Niche

Chinese immigrants often migrate to Norway for work, family reunion, or migrant networks, which are usually tied to the catering industry. Eight of the ten people that I spoke with were in some way tied to the Chinese restaurant industry. Several of the women migrated to help their husband's with a catering business, the men migrated to work as cooks, and others had at some point within their migration experience been employed at a Chinese restaurant. According to Pastor Yeung<sup>4</sup> many Chinese in Norway enjoy a good material life. Indeed, Chinese all over the world are known to be entrepreneurial and economically prosperous where “the largest part of the Chinese economic niche is the catering sector” (Christiansen 2003, 156). However, there has been little attention paid to this ‘silent’ migrant group in Norway, who are often only seen in their connection to catering (Kalvø 2007).

Indeed, several of the participants found it difficult to branch out of the catering niche. For example, Jane<sup>5</sup> is currently helping with her friend's restaurant and recounted how “*You do have dreams that are not always fulfilled immediately, and that's not always so easy.*”<sup>6</sup> Her real dream to become a teacher has been delayed, because while she is proficient in Norwegian, the academic language of the pedagogical university program was too

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<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Pastor Yeung and his wife on 21 June 2017

<sup>5</sup> Interview held on 2 July 2017

<sup>6</sup> Participant quotes have been italicized within the results section to more clearly differentiate them from the analysis and discussion.

difficult. Yet some have successfully located other opportunities, like Mingyu<sup>7</sup> who landed a summer internship with the Norwegian highway authority, Statens Vegvesen. Pamela<sup>8</sup> was also able to continue her nursing career in Norway, and is now manager of a major Norwegian chain store. However, those who have been successful have taken extra steps to do so. Mingyu took an intensive year-long Norwegian course before completing a Norwegian bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering, while Pamela's success came through mastering the local language and networking. This agrees with other findings (Thunø 1998, 170) that display how immigrant resources, local opportunities, and host reception are overlapping factors tied to the phenomenon of the catering niche.

There are particular struggles for those who continue in the catering industry. Timmy<sup>9</sup> moved to Norway to help his uncle who was working at a Chinese restaurant. He recalled,

*I was working a lot and it was tough because I was living in a big house shared with a lot of people from the restaurant I was working at. So it was just noisy all the time... and I would come home after working long days, and you know working in a kitchen the air can be very heavy, so you're really tired when you get home. And I would just want to lay on the couch and rest but it was hard, there was always people around.*

The hardships of this personal environment were magnified with the unfamiliar environment and lifestyle change in Norway. He continued, "...and normally, back in Hong Kong I liked to be active, would ride my bike and do those kind of things, but not when I came here, because it was too cold! So I started to feel really down and sorry for myself." In this way, we notice the personal and professional contexts where Chinese migrants find themselves, where they are faced with new environments in which they must adapt and find their place.

The Chinese catering niche is an easy industry for many immigrants looking for temporary work. Karen<sup>10</sup> said, "what was strange, is that my friend only mentioned to one of the owners of a restaurant here [in Norway] about me. That I only know a little bit of Norwegian, and she never even met me, and she hired me." We see here the role of migrant networks that often connect migrants to work within the catering niche. Lijuan<sup>11</sup> was also connected to the restaurant through her husband's friend and described the work as physically demanding, remembering times when she would have to work ten hours in one day. Thus, we see that the Chinese catering niche continues to play a strong role in the lives of Chinese

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<sup>7</sup> Interview held on 25 June 2017

<sup>8</sup> Interview held on 24 June 2017

<sup>9</sup> Interview held on 24 June 2017

<sup>10</sup> Interview held on 15 June 2017

<sup>11</sup> Interview held on 7 July 2017

migrants. This is an important context to keep in mind as migrants are connected to various social structures that impact how they integrate within their host society. Yet many have developed intercultural competence (Kim 2015, 1-2) through their display of openness and strength as they faced the challenge of adapting in migration.

### **Language Barrier**

Language was a major topic brought up in almost all of the interviews. The participants explained language as an obstacle in school, building relationships, job prospects, and integration. Timmy encouraged Pamela to learn Norwegian when she arrived so she could continue with her nursing degree. However, there were difficulties in the process of language learning in combination with other hardships, she said:

*Because we came here alone, we didn't really have any family and ... we didn't have really any friends. So I would just go to school and then come home and try to use my dictionary, sometimes having to figure out Norwegian to English and then English to Cantonese. So it was tough.*

Therefore, we find that language is not a simple independent entity, but overlaps with other challenges of migration and personal experiences. Several of the participants gave these types of personal examples to reiterate one of the major difficulties of the immigration experience as language learning or troubles with the language barrier. Indeed, Llamas and Watt (2019, 1) claim that “language not only reflects who we are but in some sense it *is* who we are, and its use defines us both directly and indirectly.” Jane migrated to Norway while she was still young, tired of the life she had in China and with a desire to start over. Everything was great at the beginning she recounted, “*I began learning Norwegian and knowing more the Norwegian society. Everything was new, and everything was exciting.*” She felt she got the new life she wanted, meeting locals through her work at the restaurant, making her hopeful for a good future. However, the hard part was:

*learning Norwegian. Norwegian and Chinese are two completely different languages, but I managed because I went to school and also had Norwegians around me. But nevertheless, since Norwegian is not my mother tongue I still have a lot of challenges.*

We see here the relationship between language comprehension, local contacts and context. The combination of good and bad experiences, exemplifies the complex process of migrant adaptation. This agrees with Kivisto (2014, 38) who describes how personal attributes such as education, work, and age play into negotiations of integration and identity construction.

Mingyu struggled with language in school, recounting how her local classmates would ask her why she would never go out with them and spent all of her time studying. The demand eventually made her start to feel down, she described:

*People think, “you are a little bit sick, why you study so long time every day?” But it’s difficult for me to study it in Norwegian and I really want to get a good character. So, except for first time I don’t know, I begin to not understand myself why I take so long time at school. So its... I shouldn’t do that, I’m still young, I should go out! So at that time, I feel a little upset, yeah.*

Mingyu shows how language is closely tied with one’s sense of identity and belonging. Her perception of how she ought to behave is influenced by her surroundings and other students who are not studying as much. Many of the participants mentioned that in China, the school and work hours are extremely long. However, once taken out of this context and questioned by Norwegian students, Mingyu begins thinking that she ought to go out while she is still young. This relates to Petkova’s (2015, 12) understanding on the interdependence of individual and collective identity, claiming that one’s sense of self is impacted by the social context. It also exemplifies how experiences and interpretations of self and other, leads to a continually changing frame of reference (Dahl 2008, 3). Moreover, we observe how language barrier can interfere with building relationships, and can be an added element to processes of negotiation. Joseph (2010, 9) claims that “our very sense of who we are, where we belong and why, and how we relate to those around us, all have language at their centre.” Mingyu’s language barrier is inflated by overlapping hardships related to her Chinese background and the pressure to get a good grade, local students who have a different focus on social activities and hobbies, and her positioning as a migrant.

Though Lijuan adapted quickly when she moved to Norway to reunite with her husband, she is now struggling to find a job after just having completed a Master’s degree at the University of Stavanger. She is now focusing all of her efforts on learning Norwegian. When asked whether she has been able to enjoy local hobbies and activities, she responded:

*Yeah we have some Chinese friends we talk about plans, you know, but just because we are immigrants now, I kind of focus all my attention on finding job and learning Norwegian. So maybe not much time to think about relaxing. And also I have concern about family things at the moment, maybe having kids next year, kind of things. So, not just kind of relaxing like Norwegians.*

In this we see that migrants face multiple concerns as they attempt to adapt to a new society, and juggle desires for integration with personal concerns related to family or their own goals.

Indeed, Kivisto (2014, 27) believes that immigrants exhibit a voice when negotiating terms of incorporation. Thus, we find that one's sense of self is complex as it consists of a mix of personal loyalties and circumstances, which are all constantly changing (Petkova 2005, 12).

### *Role of Language*

*Hong Kong people are very proud of being Hong Kong. So you find that when they come, the children speak Cantonese at home, no Norwegian, no English, speaking Cantonese at home. So all of them can speak very good Cantonese and they watch some TV program and video clips from HK TVB, a very popular Hong Kong channel.*

Pastor Yeung shows here that the Chinese language plays a special role for Chinese migrants, as it seems to be strongly connected to a sense of ethnic identity and cultural roots. While many learn Norwegian and integrate into society, many desire to hold on to their mother tongue as an aspect of their connection to their homeland. Indeed, Jane described the strong role of Cantonese in particular within the Overseas Chinese community in Norway, due to its historical sea trade connection to Hong Kong. As a mandarin-speaker, she even learned Cantonese once she moved to Norway to be able to relate to other Chinese migrants. This supports van Ziegert's (2006, 109) explanation that the Chinese language often reaffirms a shared identity among Overseas Chinese. By performing 'Chinese identity' through language, they mark an ethnic group boundary and enhance group solidarity. This also aligns with Tan (2011, 31) who claims that "language reinforces people's sense of national and ethnic identification."

However, while many of the participants could speak Norwegian, there were some who could not speak it at all, even after many years of living in Norway. Though they all wanted to learn the language they struggled to do so for a variety of reasons, such as age and work commitments. Timmy explained,

*But you know for a lot of us it is hard to practice the language, especially for those who work in a restaurant. Because you're really just in that environment and often with other Chinese, so you just speak Chinese, and outside of that its only here and there, you know "thank you," "you're welcome," but not substantial.*

Thus, it can be difficult when migrants are not able to find locals to practice the language with, particularly for those busy running their catering business. Åse<sup>12</sup> said, "*I think it was also difficult to simultaneously work, go to [language] school, learn to drive, and care for*

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<sup>12</sup> Interview held on 19 June 2017

*children, all at once. And the language is so hard for me, because my husband and I only speak Chinese.*” Therefore, personal contacts and situations impact abilities to learn Norwegian, which in turn effect processes of integration and settlement.

This may also explain why many Chinese migrants seek refuge with co-ethnics, and in the case of Chinese Christians, within the ethnic church. Joseph (2010, 10-14) mentions that our language is not just the words that we speak, but relates to how others perceive us as well, marking differences and social belonging. Thus, members of a community develop ways of giving and interpreting signals that display, create and maintain bonds. This is described as ‘communities of practice,’ where people come together because of shared beliefs, norms or ideologies, including shared linguistic and communicative behavior. Saussure’s idea of semiotics is also relevant here, as communication is seen as a dynamic process of meaning-making, based on a variety of signs. When people do not share the same universe of signs it can cause a barrier for establishing intercultural relationships and new horizons of understanding (Gadamer 1960). I believe it is this interrelation between language and relationships that helps explain dynamic processes of incorporation and identity reconstruction, as Chinese immigrants struggle to find their place within Norwegian society.

## **The Migrant Situation**

### *Hardships*

Other common difficulties cited for the Overseas Chinese community in Norway included depression, loneliness, and family problems. Dan<sup>13</sup> migrated to Norway to flee a destructive lifestyle, but began to feel lost when he came to Norway. He recalled,

*I was just drifting on without a goal. Just feels empty. Let me use an example, like let’s say it’s the national day in Norway. Back in that time, it’s very lovely and a lot of people in the streets celebrating. It feels like it has nothing to do with me. It was like they can do their thing, I can...I am just gonna...yeah, just empty.*

We see here how hardships stem from personal histories and situations, but can be enflamed by the migration experience. This agrees with van Ziegert’s (2006, 13) claim that “Chinese identities exist in constant tension with an entire spectrum of concerns, ranging from those that stem from within Chinese culture and history, to those that are a product of diasporic contexts.”

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<sup>13</sup> Interview held on 26 June 2017

Lijuan also explained, “...cause here, you know, it’s kind of uh, sometimes hard, especially in Norway. It’s easy to get depressed. So you got to find ways against it, positive energy.” When asked what gets her down, she replied:

*All the things, like misunderstanding from my husband. And of course, you know depressed a lot ... Yeah, I think you know maybe Chinese culture you have much more pressure than peoples in other places. When, you know, same things happen, just like we will graduate and have no job and my classmates from other countries they don’t seem to worry so much. For me, I feel so worried...*

This shows personal variables within the migration experience, as well as the continued impact of the origin society. Lijuan grew up in China and feels a pressure to work hard and maintain family harmony. While she notices that other immigrants do not face the same extent of her concern, it still contributes to the hardships of her migrant situation. Sustained ties with family and friends back home bring an additional dynamic to migrant’s feelings and self-perceptions. Mingyu described how she, of course, misses China. Yet her homesickness is most triggered when she looks at her friend’s photos on social media, supporting how the increase in technology and communications has allowed for greater transnational connectedness. This aligns with Tan’s (2011, 33) view that globalization has transformed transnational migrant experiences, as one can easily travel back and forth, video call and interact online to reproduce culture, and have more frequent meetings under time-space compression. These interactions bring a new influence of the origin society, for migrants who are facing a new society and attempting to overcome a variety of struggles.

Return migration (Sussman 2011) is a phenomenon that has arisen from related hardships and socio-historical contexts. Several of the participants returned at some point within their migration experience. Karen returned after experiencing various problems including a hurtful divorce and personal economic hardship. Åse also returned to seek medical advice from Chinese doctors. This implies how “immigration has multiple constituents, both individual and institutional, social and cultural” (Ibid., 25). Pamela returned wanting a break from her migrant struggles and described the experience saying,

*I went to go live with my mother in law, but here apartment was so tiny! And there were so many people on the streets, and I just realized “oh no I don’t like this.” So then when I came back I told him [her husband], “okay we need to stay here!” And I think that trip really helped a lot, because you know if I hadn’t taken it, maybe I wouldn’t have realized that it was good to be in Norway and it would have continued to have been really hard.*

In this case, the return trip helped give a realistic picture of the benefits enjoyed in Norway. Hence for some, their struggles in the migration experience led to a strengthened desire for home, but for others it led to the realization that ‘home’ is not always what one imagines.

### *Enjoyments*

However, it is not all doom and gloom for Chinese migrants, as all of the participants claimed that they were either satisfied or very satisfied in Norway. For many, their initial migration experience to Norway was positive. Joy<sup>14</sup> retells her first impression saying, *“Suddenly I come to Norway, Stavanger, like so beautiful village...every place has flowers, every place is green. It’s very good sunshine. But because I come in the summer, ha!”* Most of the participants noted that Norway was a beautiful place, and commented that they were amazed by its peacefulness. Many were also keenly aware of the benefits of their host society, and commented on their enjoyment of the clean air, nature, water and social welfare. Dan agreed saying, *“Even though I’m really good at adapting to a different environment, I think it’s very difficult to find another place that is as good as Norway.”* Hence, almost all of the participants intend on settling in Norway long-term. Despite the hardships related to migration many feel the pros outweigh the cons. One way that Chinese migrants appear to cope with the dynamics of their migration experience is through negotiating and reorienting.

### **Negotiating and Reorienting**

For many of the participants, identity and belonging is not a simple matter of integration or group membership. When Jane first came to Norway as a teenager, she quickly acculturated to local habits and sought to act like her local friends. She described, *“I had the same routine, did the same things, and said the same things, and went to the same things. I had many Norwegian friends I was interested in and was quite like the Norwegians.”* She also picked up Norwegian food habits, despite her distaste for dry bread slices. She said it took her ten years to realize that she did not *need* to eat bread for every meal and eventually she started to negotiate more of her personal preferences. Now, *“the times when you are eating, I follow the Norwegian, but as for the content of the food, it’s typically not Norwegian. It’s the food I made for myself or from the restaurant.”* This displays a selective acculturation process, where different elements of both societies are blended to create a new and unique form of segmented assimilation (Yang 1999, 24).

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<sup>14</sup> Interview held on 18 June 2017



Timmy explained that him and his wife feel settled in their new host society, which is further enforced by his three children. He said, “*Yeah they [his children] grew up in Norway, speak Norwegian, and are used to the Norwegian way of life. We also are more used to that now, we have gotten used to the society, the nature, the lifestyle.*” Therefore, local attachments help migrants within processes of settling. I believe this follows why Chinese migrants are known as the ‘model minority’ (van Ziegert 2006, 29) because they do in fact integrate as they adapt and reorient to Norway. Dan also described

*Behavior-wise I think I behave more like a Chinese than Norwegian, but mentally I have more or less accepted the way of Norwegian people doing things and way of thinking. I accept it, and I think I agree with them as well. But not that I can behave like them, not exactly like Norwegians, but it's getting there.*

This was an interesting statement where we see a reorientation of habitus (Vertovec 2009, 67-71) when Dan feels his behavior has adapted to local norms, but continues to remain distinctly different. He gave many examples of adapting through observation, and learning values and ideologies in relation to things such as gender roles, politeness, and egalitarianism. He later added, “*Culturally, I am more broadened. I am not as old-fashioned any more or Chinese-minded.*” Thus, we see a rise of dual orientations and a variety of values and acts drawn from different societies and cultural configurations. This reoriented habitus displays practices that have been adjusted to specific situations, showing aspects of life ‘here’ and ‘there.’

Mingyu also showed this mix of integration and ethnic preservation, which was influenced by her position as a student. For example, she works within a Norwegian workplace and helps tutor local students. Yet in relation to personal habits, she may choose either a sandwich or Chinese depending on her class schedule. While she is mixed with Norwegian students in her public life in work and school, she spends more time with fellow Chinese in her free time. This follows Yang’s (1999, 26-27) finding that Chinese migrants have different integration paths depending on a variety of factors. Some migrants continue to have one dominant identity, others a mix of two, and still others a complete mix. The coexistence of this segmented assimilation with transnationalism leads to adhesive identities, and an attachment of certain attributes of the host society to one’s existing ethnic identity. It is interesting to note the intersectionality of migration experiences, struggles, and reorientations that merge to shape a migrant’s identity and sense of belonging. This shows how identities are generated in and constructed through an internal and external dialectic

within social worlds. This “multi-local life-world presents a wider, ever more complex set of conditions that affect the construction, negotiation, and reproduction of social identities” (Vertovec 2009, 77).

## **Conclusion**

One may argue that even non-migrants struggle with similar processes and struggles of relational difficulties and identity change. Relatedly, it would be false to assume that the habitus of the host society is entirely uniform. However, the migrant situation is unique as one engages with new norms and ideologies, as well as looks with fresh perspective on the structures and relations that have shaped their own identity and belonging up until that point. Hence, I illustrate Chinese migration experiences to contribute to a better understanding of their process of negotiation and self-perception within Norwegian society. Their struggles triggered feelings of attachment to their home country and a desire to remain connected to fellow Chinese. Yet enjoyments in Norway and goals to succeed, contributed to selective acculturation processes. However, these migrant experiences are not conclusive in any sense. It would be false to assume that all Chinese immigrants maintain transnational ties or desire to be connected with co-ethnics. While I highlight them as major trends, notions of complexity and multiplicity are central themes to keep in mind as experiences are diverse and depend on many factors outside of national identifications, including personalities, skills and histories. Particularly for Chinese Christians, diverse aspects impact not only their identity formation but also where they feel they belong.

## Chapter Five

### BELONGING: “I’M A HEAVENLY CITIZEN”

#### **Introduction**

The complexities of Chinese Christian immigrant experiences, identity construction and the influence of religion can be examined in relation to the perception and negotiation of a sense of belonging. As previously discussed, I refer to belonging as a feeling of being home (Anthias 2006, 2-3), of identifying where one ‘fits in’ to society or to a part of a larger whole. This belonging can relate to the marking of group boundaries, but can also pertain to several dimensions of shared values and practices. Many social scientists believe that everybody has ethnicity, which is defined as a sense of group belonging based on shared origins, experiences, and values (Castles, Miller and De Haas 2014, 58). I focus on the process of selecting aspects of different terrains, from home and host countries, Christian beliefs and other influencing factors that build a sense of identity and belonging from a multiplicity of sources. It is interesting to see how this process came into play for Overseas Chinese Christians, in particular within local involvements and family decisions, the latter being a prime focus of the church. It was clear that multiple ties to different arenas caused a complex understanding of identity and belonging, but with a high emphasis placed on the religious domain. This section will examine the various factors that influence the sense of belonging of Chinese Christian immigrants in Norway, and how this is intimately linked with their identity and values as migrants and Christians.

#### **Ties to Norway**

Many of the participants in the study displayed involvement in the local society, yet with enduring bonds of a strong ethnic community. Several have jobs working alongside Norwegians, for example, Timmy works as a chef at a hotel with other locals. Joy works at a Norwegian grocery store and Mingyu tutors Norwegian students. Furthermore, many of the participants described being involved in local clubs or volunteer work, and have attended local events and cultural festivals. Dan is involved in the arts, explaining that you do not need to understand the language to be able to enjoy music. When Joy first arrived to Norway she volunteered with a local charity, passing out flyers alongside others to fundraise and also joined a hiking club. Mingyu has previously volunteered with the Norwegian Gladmat

festival, and Jane was actively involved in student affairs while enrolled at a local high school. Thus, Chinese immigrants are by no means detached from the local society. This aligns with Thunø (1998), who described the Chinese in Denmark as an ‘invisible’ migrant group, few in number and decently integrated. Many become involved as they search for ways to belong within Norway.

Many of the participants were interested in local news and happenings within Norway. For example, Jane said, *“I follow more on Norwegian news than the Chinese. So I live here, and that which is near me.”* She continued,

*I’m more concerned with what is happening in Norway more than the news in China. I think all the time about what Norway or Norwegians can do so that Norway can be the best place, for example, if Norway does some decisions that may lead to me thinking a lot about it, and be very happy or very sad about it.*

In this way, we see participant’s care for and interest in their host society. This agrees with studies (Yang 1999, 167-168) that show how with time, migrants tend to become increasingly concerned with local issues and their immediate surroundings. Dan would use the internet to translate the newspaper and get updates from Chinese friends who know Norwegian. Thus, we see how migrants work through barriers to stay locally informed and involved.

Furthermore, when asked where they identified ‘home,’ a majority of participants felt it was Norway. What was interesting is that those who had been migrants for five years or less described Norway as a “second home,” identifying China as their primary home or roots. This supported the idea that feelings of belonging increase with time and within the lifespan of the migration experience. Timmy said, *“I think it’s just been so long, now we have lived here so long, right? So actually we have gotten used to things, and we don’t miss anything, just family.”* After twenty-seven years in Norway, Timmy identified much more with Norway. Jane also felt a decreasing belonging to China saying, *“I don’t think I am able to travel back to China and live out life there, because China has changed much more rapidly than Norway actually. China ten years ago and China today is two completely different lands for me.”* When asked whether she felt home in Norway, she replied, *“Yeah I feel that Norway is more home than China, because it’s like I said, I am not used to living in China. I don’t understand anything anymore, and I thrive really well with the life I have here.”* This shows the impact of the situations in both sending and receiving societies. China is a developing country and growing fast, which influences new migrants and their feelings of attachment to their new society. For example, Lijuan described how the quick developments in China made

her feel that she was beginning to fall behind. She recounted how new buildings and technologies seemed to pop up in every return visit she made. In contrast, Lijuan perceived that in Norway, *“it’s always the same...it doesn’t change much.”* Thus, migrants may use their origin society as a point of reference in evaluating their new host society. Ben-Rafael (2009, 669) explains the fast development of China as a major impact for new Chinese migrants, as they are now proud to be Chinese because of its growing reputation. Mingyu claimed that she would forever feel Chinese, no matter how long she might live in Norway. When asked why, she answered *“Mm, because I love China. Yeah. And I feel proud of my country and the culture from my country,”* agreeing that it was nothing she wanted to get rid of. Thus, feelings of belonging to something common, such as Chinese identity, may persist despite increasing identification with the host society.

Eight of the nine participants said they had no intention of returning to China, many having acquired citizenship and content with their lives in Norway. Almost all of the participants described Norwegians as nice and kind, and have perceived a receiving atmosphere marked by respect and free from discrimination. Some of the major qualities of Norway, as defined by participants, are that of a peaceful and comfortable society. Lijuan said,

*It’s a very quiet country. And you know, living standards is higher than in China. So... I, I like the country. It’s not just... everything here is not as complicated as in China. So, you know you don’t have to worry about other things, just work and you know, relaxing.*

Many resonated with these sentiments, explaining how life in China was marked by hard work, long hours, crowded cities and congestion. Lijuan later stated that though she and her husband are still young, they had no intention of returning to China or to the stress of their former lifestyle. This agrees with van Ziegert (2006, 133) who says that local conditions shape Overseas Chinese communities and the transnational Chinese imaginary. Yet while almost all of the participants preferred Norway, many of them still remain attached to China in various ways. I believe this displays how transnationalism increases as our interconnectedness increases. There is no longer a *need* for migrants to fully assimilate into the host society or to cut off all ties with their former society and/or traditions. One can successfully integrate and adapt to their new context, contributing to society and the local community, while maintaining links with other places and groups. Jane described this as well explaining,

*Although, I am not concerned with all that Norwegians are concerned with, like to have many Norwegian friends and do just the same things that they do...but actually, I thrive very well with how the society is and how people are here. I am happy with the system and everything, and I contribute to the society. I work and understand why I have to pay as much taxes I do.... and I sort the waste and all those things that you need to do to keep Norway a good place.*

She further stated that the Chinese church “*is also very good for the society. Because the Chinese is a part of the Norwegian society and their lives do impact the society here.*”

Therefore, Jane confirms that the Chinese ‘belong’ to the local society through their contributions and diverse impacts. Yet, this does not necessitate a complete removal of their ethnic identification. Indeed, she argues that the ethnic Chinese church actually contributes to society. Thus, we see that transnationalism does not have to act contrary to integration, but rather is an intermeshed process of integrating and acculturating, while celebrating cultural differences and ethnic roots. While the participants were involved and settled in Norway, they continued to maintain strong ties to China.

### **Ties to China**

*They have a very strong family cultural background. It’s kind of loyal to keep or maintain the responsibility, the unity of the family. This is Chinese, this is Chinese...to show the gratitude, to show the love, to show the loyalty, to your family. This is our culture, very strong (Pastor Yeung).*

Many of the participants described ‘culture’ as a reason for their attachments to fellow Chinese, as well as barriers to local relationships. For decades, the idea of culture has been understood as a simple, essentialist notion that people use to create mental categories (Illman 2006, 107). We see this within the participant’s own use of the word ‘culture’, saying:

*“With my Chinese friends we share the same culture. Just can say anything, haha! You know?” (Lijuan)*

*“It really helped me to know the Norwegian culture, of course, but it also had some problem at the beginning, I think, for me to adapt to them.” (Mingyu)*

This is interesting and has been coined by some as a kind of ‘racial nationalism’ (Christiansen 2003, 3-12), where belonging to the ethnic group is defined by whether someone has Chinese in their blood descent. While in reality, China is made up of diverse regions and traditions, and the Overseas Chinese communities develop quite different

identities as they acculturate. Yet, the Chinese still find a sense of belonging with co-ethnics based simply off of the fact that they share a common racial descent. This phenomenon becomes increasingly intriguing within second generations that have grown up within the host society and are accustomed to completely other norms, language and values. Joy explained this diversity in her own family as she is from China, her husband is from Hong Kong but grew up in Norway, and their children attend the international school. She described the ‘culture’ clash saying, *“I find it even harder to teach them. So my husband is more like Norwegian culture, and I am more Chinese culture, and the kids are more American.”* Hence, while many Chinese immigrants recognize the diversity between and among themselves, they still largely identify as “Chinese.”

Many first-generation Chinese would like to preserve the language and cultural traditions of China, and pass it along to their children. Pamela recounted how when her son was small, she

*was very concerned that he could communicate with the others. Let’s say if we were at the health clinic, and the nurse talked Norwegian to him, I didn’t want him not to be able to say anything, right? He would look dumb... I was very concerned and talked with him so he could speak Norwegian, right? But afterwards I found out, uh that was a mistake. Actually, I must speak my mother language...*

Pamela now speaks only Cantonese with her children to ensure that they hold on to the language. We see then that pride of culture and language impacts migrant’s desires to maintain ties with their origin society. Therefore, while many Overseas Chinese desire to integrate into their host societies, and indeed studies show that most learn the local language (Christiansen 2003, 17), there continues to be an interest in upholding their ethnic identity and connection to China.

Most of the participants stayed connected to friends and family in China through smart phone apps such as WeChat and QQ. Many traveled back to their origin cities one to two times a year, and had visitors to Norway at the same frequency. Only very few had less contact than this, citing costs for travel and lack of time as major reasons. Thus we see how modern technology and affordable travel makes it possible for immigrants to remain connected to their home societies like never before. Yet outside of such contact, many of the participants maintained their ties in other, easier ways. For example, most of the participants continued to follow news from Hong Kong/China, many even on a daily basis, and are locally connected to ethnic Chinese. This exemplified how globalization has helped migrants

to sustain networks across long distances and foster multiple identities (Castles, Miller and Se Haas 2014, 41).

### *Segmented Assimilation*

While the Chinese community in Norway does not have a strong ethnic presence in the form of Chinese neighborhoods or festivals, every single one of the participants stated that they had more Chinese friends than Norwegian and/or international friends. Mingyu remembered the struggles she experienced in trying to form bonds with her Norwegian classmates saying,

*I can speak Norwegian, I can understand you. But something when you talk, I do not really know what you are talking about, what you are joking with. I think its culture gap. And it really takes a long time, and I still cannot handle it.*

When asked whether she had more Chinese or Norwegian friends she answered, *“I think I always will have more Chinese friends than Norwegian friends. Yeah but I have several, or few, Norwegian friends.”* She explained by saying fellow Chinese migrants share a bond of having similar experiences. We see that while many Chinese migrants are integrated, there remains a preference to spend free time with fellow Chinese. This agrees with Yang’s (1999, 17) observation that for many modern immigrants, integrating and retaining an ethnic identity are simultaneous and cohesive processes. Levitt (2010, 41) also states how

Increasing numbers of newcomers will not fully assimilate or remain entirely focused on homelands but will continue to craft some combination of the two in ways that ebb and flow across the life course. Their lives will be enabled and constrained by multiple cultural repertoires and institutions.

Lijuan also described her friends saying,

*Most of them are Chinese, haha. I know some international students in the school, but um, you know, we don’t play together very often. For Chinese friends, it’s just very close, and every week we meet.*

When asked why she thought that was, she answered

*...because with my Chinese friends we share the same culture. Just can say anything, haha! You know? But sometimes, there’s misunderstanding when I talk to the international students.*



Thus, we see that language and culture are described as major reasons for deeper relationships with co-ethnics, where ethnic identification seems to help migrants in coping with cultural differences. This aligns with Vertovec's (2009, 73-74) view that management of multiplicity shows culture to be like a 'toolkit' where cultural attributes are drawn from different sources, and embedded in different relations and structures.

This preference may explain why Chinese immigrants sometimes face the stereotype of always staying with their group. However, Mingyu believed many were guilty of the same saying,

*Yeah so, I think people really want to be together with people who know [emphasis] each other. So that's easier. And I think that most people, for Norwegians as well, when they can go abroad, my classmates, they go abroad to study, they also like to get together, so, yeah!*

Thus, she argues that many tend to feel a sense of belonging to those who share their language and norms. In responding to comments of Chinese Christians not wanting to integrate with others, Pastor Yeung also argued:

*But this is the cultural...Because just say like Norway, they arrive with the Seamen church, everywhere. That's why in America there are a lot of Seamen church and try to make contact with the Norwegian in America, even though they can speak good English. That is interesting. Just like the Chinese church in UK, in France, you know, in Germany. Why? Because they all - second generation, third generation, even in America, the fourth generation, the fifth generation, they can speak very fluent English. But they still ... want a family, tied with the Chinese.*

He points out that Overseas Chinese desire to maintain their feelings of a family, of a relational attachment to the Chinese. I find it interesting to consider if, to a degree, they shed light to a common desire to belong with those who you consider to be 'like' you. Trevor Phillips, Britain's former chairman of The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), has spoken out on this topic in the documentary, *Things We Won't Say About Race That Are True* (Sommers 2015). This confronts an abstract hybridity, where we can see that the state still matters, but under a salience of location. It also agrees with Erdal's (2017) urge for globalization studies to give a realistic picture of what is actually going on in real life. Moreover, it raises the question of how multiculturalism is (and will be) defined in our postmodern age. Will it be marked by simultaneous connectedness, a "coming-together" with sustained diversity? Or will societies be increasingly diversified with immigrants who are both integrated yet apart, home yet not, an in-between of belonging both 'here and there'?

## *Multi-Sited Belonging*

*Maybe I continue to be Chinese inside...maybe, yeah, I think so. But I don't know, how I should be actually... haha! ...because I have lived here so long. I can't say I am Chinese, because Hong Kong, also yeah...but if you ask me, of course, I continue to say I am Chinese. But, but... on the other hand I live here, right? And I like to be here and I love to be here. So maybe a Norwegian Chinese! Hah. Yeah that is right! So that is what I would say.*

Timmy describes the complexity of a multi-sited belonging and multi-layered identity. He is from Hong Kong, thus not-quite Chinese. A migrant, yet used to Norway and no longer identifying 'home' as Hong Kong. It is interesting that when he coins the term "Norwegian Chinese" a laugh follows, as such a concept has yet to take root in Norway. This may be due to the fact that Norway is a relative late-comer to immigration, and the Chinese are not yet a significant migrant group within society. This is unlike places like the US and the UK, which have much older immigrant histories and have adopted hybrid terms such as "Mexican American" or "British Chinese." In Norway, both first and second generation give the label "Overseas Chinese," despite the slight inadequacy of such a term to reflect the reality of their identity complexities. Timmy also touched on the fact that the notion of a 'Chinese' identity is not so simple.

*You can't be fully sure that with Chinese they have the same background as the youth or us, because they have grown up here. They [his children] speak Norwegian, they think Norwegian, yeah...they just don't look Norwegian. Also, globalization today- An African is almost completely like an American. Right? So it's hard to say. But I also say, although they have grown up in Norway, they have very...although I wasn't totally 'Chinese' haha, because we have some English background from Hong Kong.*

This hints at the dynamics that are part of transnational migrant families. It also aligns with Sussman's (2011) study that explains the complexity of the Hong Kong identity. Indeed, when asked whether they felt Norwegian or Chinese, both or other, many of the participants described a simultaneous or multi-sited belonging.

*I feel a little more on both sides. Because ...I don't feel Norwegian, even though I don't feel I love Norway any less than Norwegians do. But at the same time, I use so much time with the Chinese church haha. So I would say both (Jane).*

*I will say that I am more, like a very international Chinese (Dan).*

We see, then, that integration and transnational ties can be mutually enforcing. This agrees with scholars (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg 2009, 6) who argue that as transnational migration increases, the nation-state container view of society is increasingly inadequate to capture the complex interconnectedness of modern reality.

### **Religious Belonging**

To add to the negotiation of Chinese Christian immigrants' sense of belonging, is the place of their religious beliefs and Christian membership. For many of the participants, their beliefs were prioritized as one of the major factors influencing decisions such as assimilation, child raising, and maintaining traditions. Pamela described how they tried to mix both Chinese and Norwegian norms as they raised their children, but ultimately with Biblical authority having the final say. She explained,

*We had to clarify and tell why some in school can do like this but you can't do like that. So many things we had to blend, the good parts from China and the good from Norway. So I think it was best to raise them in that way. Also many are not Christian, so if there is a discussion that seems to go nowhere then we must find out what does the Bible say? Right? So they would say "okay, yeah." So that is the most important.*

In this we see a negotiation process, of selecting the good elements of host and home societies with a priority placed on religious beliefs. Thus, we see Yang's (1999, 179) observation that the Christian identity helps provide a solid ground where individuals can selectively reject and accept certain things tied to Chinese or Norwegian contexts, and justify their choices with a mental peace and theological assurance. This agrees with Levitt's (2007a, 114) prediction that transnational religious belonging will increase within modern times.

Jane described this belonging in how she felt the Christian faith gave her life meaning, saying "God tells us we're not quite dead. We can go up to heaven and be with Him, for eternity. And that gives life meaning. Life without meaning – who wants such a life?" She later explained that before she came to Norway she had thoughts to commit suicide, because she saw no meaning in life. After she became a Christian, she feels that she can have hope knowing that she is in a safe hand, regardless of what happens in the world around her. In this way, we see that belonging involves an important affective dimension (Anthias 2006, 21). Furthermore, Jane prioritizes religious beliefs to inform her perceptions saying, "In the Bible the truth is written. The truth is important. The truth makes... you don't feel you just follow others. Even though everyone else maybe walks an opposite direction, but that doesn't mean that they have the truth." She later added how she thought one ought to

*“go to church and learn what is right or wrong, learn the real truth directly from the Bible instead of thinking the same way that others think and do the same mistakes that others do.”*

Jane’s belonging to her faith has provided her an absolute ground to negotiate practical elements of life, such as integration and relationships. We observe then, what Day (2011, 196) explained as an everyday experience and feeling of religious belonging, embodied through acts and sustained through church rituals where shared values are told.

The participants’ membership in the church also played an important role in child-rearing, which is one of the church’s main ministries. According to Pastor Yeung, *“The concern is to build up the faith among the Chinese family. I think if they have a strong faith then their children will be blessed.”* This focus on the family foundation echoed Yang’s (1999, 38) thoughts that the “church gives a sense of belonging for Chinese immigrants and forges a close-knit community for their children’s moral education.” Participants felt that these needs were not easily met in non-ethnic churches or institutions. For example, Jane believed that the Norwegian school ought to have had the responsibility for raising children and teaching them values. However, due to secularization it has lost its role. She argued,

*It is important also to guide and to instruct in what is truth and what is good behavior so that they don’t learn from all these different things that are happening in the world... Because school does not teach these things, and you see in the school you just learn relativism, like the modern way of thinking. They think that the Bible is old fashioned.*

We see here the church’s response to take over this area, to train the next generation to be good citizens and ultimately, Christians. In this we observe the role of the church in helping to maintain a distinctive value system (Yang 1999, 116). We also see that the Chinese church is independent but not isolated, where members are well integrated in public spheres with the church playing a major role in private ones. Indeed, one of the most common statements in referring to the church was NCCC Stavanger as a “family.” Pamela enjoys the small and intimate atmosphere of the Chinese church. She said *“we live just like a family,”* as a close-knit community who often helps one another. Karen agreed, saying that unlike the social gathering of churches in Hong Kong, the members of NCCC Stavanger were like real brothers and sisters. Mingyu also described her closeness to Pastor Yeung, seeing him as like an uncle to her, and often going to him and his wife for advice.

When asked how participants self-identified, Åse answered *“I will just say this - I am a heavenly citizen. I love both Chinese and Norwegian, I love all.”* Therefore, religious

belonging was highlighted as an important aspect of the identity and lived experiences of Chinese Christians in Stavanger. Pamela also commented,

*I feel I am not... it is very difficult, complicated! Because when I was in Hong Kong, I didn't feel I was completely Chinese, because we have some English background. Also when I came to Norway, I didn't feel I was Norwegian either. So actually I can't say anything about that, but I can say I am like a child to my Father in Heaven, haha! So in the end we are the same nationality in Heaven, right?*

We see here their perceptions of their identity and belonging as a complex issue, but which is eased by their feelings of attachment to their faith and the church. Thus, while the Chinese Christian church in Stavanger is manifested as an area of particular ethnic group belonging, several of the members highlighted a transworld religious belonging above other factors.

## **Conclusion**

As we examine the sense of belonging of Chinese Christian immigrants we see an interplay of local involvements, ties to China and religious membership that creates a multi-sited belonging related to various, interconnected areas. Of these, religious belonging seemed to play an important role within the negotiation of segmented assimilation, child-rearing and identity. This follows globalization theories which predict that people will increasingly relate and feel 'home' to non-territorial and transworld groups, with a decreasing role of the nation-state (Erdal 2017). Thus,

Religious identities in the age of globalization have persisted and been transformed, although they have not lost touch with their roots in humankind's quest for meaning. Indeed, the rise of global communications and mass migration has meant not the desacralization of society, as some social sciences predicted, but a reinvestment in the meaning of both traditional and new religious identities, many of which are not rooted in any specific time or place (Gladney 2012, 1465).

This complexity of belonging also shifts the perception of identity from a possession to a process of construction and reconstruction dependent on local situations, personal beliefs, past histories and traditional roots. Ong and Nonini (1997, 24-25) agree that identity is, rather, what connects people to society. This concept of identity allows people to have multiple and diverse identities in relation to a variety of domains such as religion, race, nationality, subculture, dominant culture, and so on. It is interesting to examine the intersections of these different areas to see how they compete and contest within various negotiations played out on a daily basis. This multi-sited, simultaneous belonging reveals the

reality that people's identity, and increasingly transnational identities, is in a constant stage of change and becoming. It also displays how new transnational, or even supranational, religious identities transcend traditional regional, state and cultural boundaries (Gladney 2012, 1465). While touched on briefly in this chapter, it is this role of religion that we will turn to next.

## Chapter Six

### ROLE OF RELIGION: “IT GIVES MEANING TO LIFE”

#### **Introduction**

To analyze immigrant’s negotiations of identity and belonging, I will investigate the role of religion and how it plays out in these processes. A lot of research outlines the connection between migration and religion, revealing that personal faith and the religious community is important within the lives of many migrants (Frederiks 2015). My investigation showed that this was also the case with Chinese Christians in Norway. Thus, I will discuss and analyze in what ways their religious beliefs played an important role in their lives. I begin with the topic of conversion to introduce how the participants came to Christianity, many within the migrant experience, and reasons they chose to convert. This provides a backdrop to their initial contact with Christianity, which was said to have influenced their identity and provided a new sense of belonging to the Christian faith and the ethnic church. I then discuss the role of the Chinese church, where I look at its qualities as a transnational space and its global link to the Overseas Chinese church. The church adds an initial dimension to the impact of religion within the migrant’s lives. Made up mostly of new converts, the church informs understandings of what it means to be a Christian and how to live out the Christian life. It also compliments transnational ties to co-religionists and creates a community built around a common belief system. I conclude with an analysis on the impact of the participant’s beliefs and how they inform their values, identity (re)construction, and sense of community. These areas highlight how conversion experiences and the ethnic church feed into negotiation processes of identity, showing the role of religion as multi-layered.

#### **Conversion**

This section discusses how the participants converted to Christianity to provide a backdrop to their initial contact with the religion and reasons for their eventual commitment to a new faith. I highlight their conversion experiences as it plays an important role, acting as a launching point for processes of negotiating identity and belonging.

## *Contact with Christianity*

*Then suddenly I saw Jesus, and his face is radiating and his clothes are very light, shining. But his face is even more shiny, I can't even see his face, and I said "Jesus, help me!" and I woke up. Then I became very emotional, started crying and said "Jesus, you helped me! I want to believe in you!" I thank Jesus so much.*

Åse's sentiments echoed many of the participants who were deeply touched by their first contact with Christianity. Conversion experiences often acted as a launching point for identity (re)construction as it gave a new meaning and priority in life. Pollack (2012, 1462) describes religious conversion saying, "It is usually not the converts who find their new faith, but the faith which finds them." Many of the Chinese Christians who I spoke to described an initial interest in Christianity through either an experience of Jesus, a search for meaning or curiosity. Moreover, several of the participants' initial contact with the faith was through local Norwegian Christians. Åse described her experience saying, "*Before I believed in different Chinese gods, but I did not get peace in my heart. When I looked at my Norwegian language teacher, she is so kind and she showed me Jesus.*" She later added how her teacher would pray, help and support her. Here we see how there are a variety of factors that may influence why one might be open to a new religion. For example, Karen felt a desire to attend Christian meetings,

*Because when I first met the teachers that were teaching Norwegian they were really nice and really kind. They were really just there to help you and not after anything. You don't meet people like that in China. Even people that claim to be Buddhist, they're not that friendly, they don't have the passion to help you and get to know you. I wanted to know why the Christians were so friendly, and so willing to help.*

We see here how the attraction to Christianity may stem from its focus on evangelism and practical services. Similar to Åse, Karen's curiosity was sparked through her Norwegian Christian teachers who helped her, and displayed an attractive kindness and care. This agrees with claims that say conversion involves both personal consciousness and social belonging, all of which are dependent on context and individual personalities (Buckser and Glazier 2003, preface). Timmy had also been searching for answers, he recalled:

*I had faith in something, but I didn't know where or what. So I felt I can go [to church] to try to know and to find out what it is. I had heard of Christian people and I had a Norwegian missionary teacher who taught Norwegian to us, and you meet many who are good people and who are kind to us. So I know that the religion has a very good attitude so that you are very calm and polite with others, right? So I had a*



*desire to find out and see how far I could come. Therefore, we were always there [at church] as often as we could.*

Here we see that the ethnic church helped to inform the curiosity of those seeking a meaning-making system<sup>15</sup>, and supports Rambo's (1993) claim that religious conversion opens up opportunities to gain a nurturing and guiding philosophy for life. Timmy's search related to other participants whose initial contact with Christianity came through questions, a practical need, and a desire for purpose.

A few of the participant's initial contact with Christianity came through friends or family. Mingyu became a Christian in China when her best friend brought her to church, Lijuan converted through the influence of her roommate's mother, and Dan became curious via migrant networks when the son of his landlord began attending NCCC Stavanger. Thus, my investigation aligns with claims that social networks can act as a significant influence within the occurrence of conversion (Pollack 212, 1461). In this way, we see strong global flows of Christianity brought about from a grassroots level. Indeed, the local spread of Christianity can be seen as a major reason for its personal and public presence in societies all over the world (Kim and Kim 2008, 211-212). Hence, we find an interplay of dynamic global and local forces that have shaped the conversion stories of many Chinese migrants. Within these testimonies, we also discover that Chinese Christians initial contact with Christianity is diverse. Yet what are some of the major reasons that they eventually choose to move forward with the next stage of actual conversion to a new, and somewhat foreign, faith?

### *Reasons for Conversion*

A search for meaning and answers to prayer were two major reasons participants gave for their conversion to Christianity. Pamela described how she had grown up in a Christian family, but had moved away from her faith. It was only until she came to Norway, faced with new struggles and loneliness, that she realized her need for God. This is like Yang's (1999, 86; 94) findings, which showed that migrants can sometimes feel helpless, and life meaningless, under the hardships of immigration. Pamela then prayed and asked God to return to her life and to give her a friend in Norway. Her cry for help was answered when the next day she was invited to join an Overseas Chinese women's Bible study. This also shows how Chinese migrants are attracted to the solid foundations that Christianity provides, and

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<sup>15</sup> According to Hall (2006, preface), the Chinese have become more open to Christianity as many are looking for alternative meaning-making systems after the collapse of traditional culture in China.

are grafted into a community of shared values. Pamela described how when she joined the Chinese Bible study she had amazing fellowship, which provided a stronger desire to never turn back from her faith again. She explained that there was a big change in her life after her prayer and the provision she received, saying that she was like a new person afterwards.

Religious seeking can be heightened within the migration experience as one is separated from all that was once known and is given space to consider bigger questions in life. Mingyu was moved to become a Christian before she moved to Norway, but described how the migrant experience triggered a greater connection to her faith. She explained,

*You know in China, we have a lot of fun, and you have a lot of friends around you. Also you do not have time to think about your life, or something, yeah. So when I come to Norway I got a lot of time, haha, thinking about life. So I think it's from that time, Jesus, He comes to me.*

We see how the migration experience provided a context that allowed for stronger religious conviction. We also see the influence of the origin society, which follows Kivisto's (2014, 28-29) view that the removal of meaning-making systems in China is one reason why many are searching for answers. He further claims that conservative Christianity can be attractive for the Chinese because it echoes traditional Confucian values, while providing a more grounded certainty and truth claim. Lijuan also described a strengthening of faith within migration, saying *"if it's not for the immigration experience I might not be quite strong about my religion. The hardships make me believe more in my religion."* We see her change in perspective in her answer to a question regarding the purpose of life where she replied, *"Well if you know, you ask me several years ago I will like to say to a happier life. But now I think I just live for God now, because if I live for myself life is meaningless. So, just live for God."* Many of the participants related to this response, with a recurring theme of Christianity as a source of purpose and meaning.

Yet the psychological support of religion is not a catch-all explanation of the phenomenon of conversion. Several of the participants were once devoted to other religions, however, they specifically pointed out the inadequacy of their former beliefs in comparison to their Christian ones. Åse described her supernatural experience when she returned to China to seek medical advice for a particular health difficulty. Her and her mother prayed to what she called 'false gods,' but she was left with no peace. She added, *"So then I thought, I can't think about the false gods I need to think about Jesus. And then the peace came back into my heart."* She then felt these false gods take hold of her, and she called out to Jesus for help.

She described having a vision of Jesus who pulled her out and saved her. This experience led to her, her sister and her mother's immediate conversion, which later influenced how she negotiated her identity and belonging in Norway.

Karen also encountered Jesus when she returned to Hong Kong and had been praying to Buddhist deities to help her. She began to feel a heavy burden on her chest and became suicidal. When she visited the church with her sister, the leader recognized that she was possessed and performed an exorcism. She described the experience saying

*At that time, my sister and her friend was present as well, and they saw my facial expression – sometimes I was crying, and smiling, and then suddenly all pale. So they were scared, so they distanced themselves in the same room...Later another team/group leader from the church joined praying. Then I felt that something came out. I didn't actually throw up, but a lot of saliva came up. So I felt a lot better, a lot lighter, after that. And when I was done and opened my eyes, I found everything very beautiful. Every person was very beautiful, every single furniture, chair, it was beautiful.*

Afterwards, she immediately converted, recounting

*I felt like I just suddenly woke up and I wasn't sure what I was thinking earlier, and wasn't sure why I was acting that way. And he asked again "Do you believe that Jesus can save you? Do you want to believe God?" And I immediately answered, "Yes I do." That's the night that I made the commitment to follow God. It was around 3am at night. Since I was a Buddhist I only ate vegetarian food, no meat. "Since you are now a follower of Christ, you can now eat meat!" my sister said.*

Here we see the emotional and practical implications of conversion on migrant's lives. Not only was Karen 'saved' from evil, but she was grafted into a new community with new values and traditions, which led to other transformations of habits, diets and rituals.

For other participants, their experience of God was over a longer period of time. Jane described,

*After many years and after many things had happened, I just had to recognize that God existed and He was the one at work. So in the end, even though I hadn't read the Bible and didn't understand completely salvation or all that Jesus had done... but I just had to believe that God existed because of all He had helped with in my life.*

It was interesting to see how despite a lack of knowledge of the Christian faith, many still converted due to personal, spiritual experiences with God. For some, it was immediate and for others it was a process, showing how the conversion experiences of Chinese migrants are diverse and influenced by a variety of factors. Thus, I believe it may be unjustly simplified to

conclude that religion is just a source of social capital, psychological support, or group belonging. Rather, I agree with scholars like Ammerman (2007, 229-234) that challenge research to view religion within its lived reality and meaning, and to consider its multi-layered influences and practices. Like in Yang's (1999, 70) study, Chinese Christians themselves are unsatisfied with a simplified conclusion of their beliefs. Timmy explained,

*So I believe that still today, the church continues to have much to work with, how to show itself here. It's a place you can find God. Don't misunderstand that it's just a place that we hang out together or be some little social gathering, yeah...it is the faith that the church must work with, because without that, we have just a lifetime to live out. I think it is important for us who believe in it and maybe for those who don't yet believe in it..."*

We see here the importance of considering the multi-layered influences that lead to conversion with a combination of factors such as the migrant situation, the context of China, and experiences of Jesus. The Chinese have different motivations for becoming Christian that change as they grow and mature within their beliefs<sup>16</sup>. Thus, to look just at primary reasons for conversion would be inadequate of the whole picture. Rather, we must study the various impacts of migrant religion to better understand such a phenomenon and appreciated its complex role within negotiations of identity and belonging. Yet while a phenomenon, per definition, is difficult to explain, we can examine the character and nature of beliefs and religious institutions.

### **Role of the Chinese Church**

In this section I will discuss the role of the Chinese church within its members' lives. I will outline the qualities of the church to explain the context where migrants practice their beliefs and experience fellowship. I will also discuss links that the church maintains with other Overseas Chinese churches, as well as perspectives of global Christian mission. I will then explain the impact of religious beliefs on migrant's negotiations of values, identity, and community. I discuss these areas to investigate how the transnationalization of religious life impacts formations of identity and belonging.

#### *A Transnational Space*

The Nordic Chinese Christian Church of Stavanger is planted right in the middle of the city. The physical meeting space of the church is historically tied to the Norwegian prayer house

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Lijuan on 7 July 2017

revival yet filled with Chinese people. The walls are lined with photos of Norwegian Christians and the famous Norwegian revival painting hangs over the pulpit where the Chinese pastor now stands. Consisting of forty to fifty members, the weekly Sunday service is conducted in both Cantonese and Mandarin and made up of people from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau. Worship is simple, with a piano drowned out by loud voices singing in unison. The words of the Chinese Christian songs are displayed on a projector screen, sometimes including the Norwegian or English translation. Described as non-denominational evangelical, common Christian practices such as the Lord's prayers and benediction are also part of the service. The pastor, originally from Hong Kong, has been an Overseas Chinese for twenty-four years and has experience in the catering industry, making him relatable to much of the congregation. He preaches with zeal and includes illustrations that incorporate some humor. After the service, both Chinese and local snacks are served, such as eggrolls and Norwegian waffles. Two local Norwegians are also in attendance, connected to the church through their Chinese wives. The second generation makes up about one-fourth of the congregation, and the church struggles to meet their needs as many speak Norwegian and are more oriented to local customs and ways of life<sup>17</sup>.

Within several of the interviews, participants explained the significance of the Chinese church as a place where they could experience God in their mother tongue and have fellowship with other believers. Karen said her reason for going to church is to personally seek God. She said, *"I think God is using Pastor Yeung's mouth to explain the Bible so that I can learn more about the truth, and I am really appreciative of learning more about the truth every time."* Thus, she focuses on knowledge of the Bible, a source which she believes holds truth. Dan also commented, *"The only expectation when I go to Bible study and Sunday service, I just want to meet the brothers and sisters and try to learn, and if possible revisit the sermon in group discussion."* Within several of the interviews, participants emphasized Bible knowledge, fellowship with other believers and prayer. Jane also said,

*So I must grow and learn about God's word and understand more what is in the Bible. In the Bible, you find the way and the truth and the life, and you don't find that anywhere else. And without having church life or without continuing to study that which stands in the Bible or knowing God's will, so I cannot know where I'll take myself in life, where I'm going, yeah, because the world changes all the time. And the opinions of people change all the time.*

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<sup>17</sup> According to the Pastor's wife from our conversation on 21 June 2017

Here we observe how the ethnic church informs its members of what it means to be a good Christian and what to focus on in life. Religious text also informs what the participants deem as ‘truth’ and provides guiding principles to life.

In practice, the ethnic church maintains cultural boundaries as it symbolizes a place for Chinese. Pastor Yeung described how the Chinese have a very strong cultural background, which he believes is central to barriers of integration and a key aspect of Chinese immigrant identity. However, within the interviews themselves, very few of the participants brought up culture in relation to the Chinese church. Rather, like Karen and Dan, many of them described the role of the church in relation to their spiritual enrichment and maturation in faith. This was a contrast to studies like Pattraporn’s (2012, 43), which depicted the Buddhist temple as a reterritorialized space for national and cultural reinforcements, where Thai migrants felt they could be ‘transported’ back to Thailand and enjoy Thai food and people. However, none of the participants in this study mentioned their attraction to the church in relation to Chinese food or even the Chinese people. Yet the church does come together to celebrate Chinese holidays like Chinese New Year and Spring Festival, and share Chinese food together. In this way, while not emphasized by participants, we still observe some evidence of how, within the ethnic church, migrants can merge their transworld religious beliefs with aspects of their existing ethnic identity, holding both simultaneously. This agrees with studies (Yang 1999, 18), which show that the religious community can serve as a major social mechanism in the construction of adhesive identities.

One major factor participants did mention for attending the Chinese church was the language. Åse was attending a Norwegian church, but said “*I think the Lord led me to the Chinese church, because of my language difficulties.*” Indeed, when several of the participants were asked why they did not attend a local church or an international church with translation, many answered that it simply was not the same as receiving the message directly in one’s mother tongue. Jane said,

*Language is so special. I know Norwegian, I can go to a Norwegian church and listen and sing the same songs. But the feeling at the Chinese church is a little different, completely different, because since it is in Chinese it speaks to me more. There is more that goes directly into my heart and is more emotional. And that’s why we have this small Chinese church here. There are people who need to have a pastor here that speaks their language.*

We see then the value placed on receiving and practicing faith in one’s original language. However, it would be false to claim that culture and language are mutually exclusive notions.

Indeed, one's language often overlaps with personal history and cultural traditions. Thus, the Chinese church is a space where Chinese Christians gather based off of a transworld religious belonging, while also united by an imagined ethnic identity. Moreover, within the church, members blend Chinese and local traditions, foods and language, particularly for the second-generation. Pamela explained,

*Yeah, so when you hear the priest or the pastor, of course, you feel very touched when you use your own language. But now and then, we also invited a Norwegian pastor or priest, and I heard it and understood but something was lacking. But we continue to invite them because we know our youth; they can hear Norwegian and understand better, right? So we often think throughout the year, now and then we must invite other Norwegian pastors to come or priests, because the youth need that, right?*

In this way, we see a negotiation between aspects of host and home societies, intertwined with religious beliefs and practices within a dynamic, transnational space. This transnationalization of religious life (Levitt 2007b) builds up a sense of identity and belonging rooted in a non-territorial arena of religion and spiritual belief. It is further emphasized within global links maintained by the church, as well as a vision of global mission.

### *Global Links*

An interesting attribute of the Chinese church in Stavanger is its position underneath the umbrella organization of Nordic Chinese Christian churches. Within this partnership, the churches share the same mission and values, as well as conduct joint ministries, such as youth and women's networks. English is used for the youth in these events as the medium language, despite some debate as to whether English or Chinese ought to be considered the 'international' language<sup>18</sup>. These ties across borders display the connectedness of Overseas Chinese communities. It also supports the idea that transnationalism goes beyond ties between host and home societies, and extends to countries of co-religionists creating what has been called, 'transnational social fields' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 9). For example, many Overseas Chinese churches are connected to COCM, Chinese Overseas Christian Mission. During one of my visits to the church, I also noticed a back table filled with pamphlets of global Chinese Christian organizations, which advertised personal stories,

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<sup>18</sup> According to Pastor Yeung, there have been some debates criticizing that an "international church" ought to be English-speaking, claiming it as a new form of imperialism. From China's worldview, the "international church" could just as well be Chinese-speaking.

prayer requests and devotionals directed to an Overseas Chinese audience. This relates to Levitt's (2004, 5) call to understand the role of religion in transnational migration by examining how lived religion crosses borders, exploring their influence on related countries, and analyzing cross-border religious relationships.

Pastor Yeung talked about the mission of the church to evangelize, particularly Overseas Chinese, with a focus on those in catering. He described this as a natural vision saying,

*Of course we are targeting on Chinese, because we are a Chinese church, and we are called to spread the Gospel among Chinese, but for the next generation or third generation, they can speak local language. And especially because the kingdom is for so many people, not just for the Chinese, not only for Jewish...this is not true. We are gentiles, foreigners.*

We see here a vision of universal, yet particular, global mission. This agrees with Erdal's (2017) examination of the intersectionality of migration, religious organizations that cross borders, and the religious dimension of transnational exchange. Migrant transnationalism displays an inherent interdependence of practices and identifications, such as a sense of belonging and group membership. For Christian migrants, the Chinese church provides this membership and belonging, while feeding into migrant transnationalism. The question of assimilation is one that has been raised to Pastor Yeung and his wife before, with the issue of what will happen to the Chinese church with second, third, and fourth generations. The church in Norway is young; it started officially in 2003 and is just now catering to the second generation. Questions are arising as to how to serve those who do not necessarily align with first-generation perspectives or attachments to things like the Chinese language or customs. He explained, *"Yeah, we always talk about this because we know the gospel is not just for the Chinese...but we were called to serve a group of people, yeah? That's it!"* He continued,

*But I think the growing of the church is, wow, is amazing. It's like a tree, everybody can come, it will grow bigger and bigger. But I don't know if we can see it on earth, or maybe the universal church is... What the Bible says is the universal church is, we are local churches but we all belong to God. Inside our bodies is the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus Christ, that is what universal means. It will be in the future, in the new world, in Heaven. Then, we can see. But on earth, nowadays, I can't imagine. You can imagine but it's not that true, the reality.*

Thus, he explains the universal vision of the church, but with particularities in this life. The question of ethnicity has formed a shifting paradigm between old and new Overseas Chinese



churches. Some of these churches are beginning to ask whether their priority should be on maintaining an ethnic orientation or focusing on missionary activities with a universal nature of Christian belief (Mori 2014, 268).

However, several of the members of the church seemed to understand mission as a “both-and” rather than “either-or.” Åse believed the mission of the Chinese church was to care for people from China, as well as Norwegians who live in the area. Jane discussed how,

*It is important also to guide and to instruct in what is truth and what is good behavior so that they (the youth) don't learn from all these different things that are happening in the world. But they have a truth that they can learn about that keeps a society stable and a good place...and you know Christianity, doesn't teach people to take revenge or hurt other people. And that is a very important teaching, for first and second and other generations to come.*

Thus, some of the participants believed that the role of the church was to train up believers and young people to contribute to local society and to stand for good and truth in a world of relativity and violence. While Pastor Yeung wants to focus on Overseas Chinese, he did explain that on church gospel days, he encouraged everyone to use whatever language they have to reach out to whoever they may come into contact with. Pastor Yeung's wife described how the kids would approach locals saying, “Jesus elsker deg,” or “Jesus loves you” in Norwegian. We see here Sanneh's (2003, 130) description of translation being one of the major attributes of Christianity as a global religion, which is brought to a local level. In the same way, the mission of the Chinese church is to spread Christianity globally, but with a special call to ethnic Chinese. Yet many participants saw the role of the Chinese church to influence local society as well. This exemplifies the blend of the global and local within migrant religion and religious identity (Drønen 2013, 19-21). Thus, Chinese Christian immigrants maintain global and local links that create a dynamic role of the Chinese church that influences how the members of the church negotiate their values, identity, and community.

## **Impact of Beliefs**

### *Values*

Within the interviews, many of the participants explained the great impact their conversion and religious beliefs had and continues to have on practical and spiritual dimensions of their life. For many, their conversion to Christianity influenced their priorities and values. Jane said,

*After I became a Christian and learned more and more, and everything changed in my lifestyle and prioritizing different things, so I began to prioritize to live the life that Jesus lived and how he wants all Christians to live. And church life is very very important, and to participate in God's service is also very important and to learn and serve each other and know God.*

For Jane, her values and priorities were defined by her religious identity and belonging to the ethnic church. Åse also described an immense commitment to the church and her faith, saying

*I feel it is very important in my life to be a Christian. First, my husband said "Don't use so much time or all your thoughts on the church" but I said ...yes, I want to. I love Jesus and the Church, and I got baptized because **I want to live for Jesus** [emphasis]. Jesus is my life.*

In this way, we see values that are rooted in Christian devotion and service. We also observe a prioritization of religious identity and belonging, which impacts perceptions of what is important in life.

Yet the values within the church and the focus of its members seem to be drawn from a variety of sources. For example, Dan described his transformation saying

*Because of the belief I have changed a lot as well, behavior-wise. It's like if something very upsetting happens, I tell myself that I am a Christian now. I just think since I'm a Christian now, I need to do better and not just go yelling at people and things like that. So I can control my temper a lot better.*

Therefore, he connects his life as a Christian to notions of good morality and avoidance of bad behavior. When asked what he thought was the purpose of being a Christian, he answered: "*Most important I think is glorify God as a Christian and not hurt God's name in any way. Like, for example, through our behavior other people can see it, and other people will get the wrong image of our belief and our God; and the other is helping other people.*" He thus reinforces his understanding of glorifying God to be rooted in things such as good behavior and doing good to other people. This follows Yang's (1999, 43-44) observation that many of the values of Chinese Christians are intertwined with Confucian morality, emphasizing filial piety, hard work, and peace. The focus of NCCC Stavanger is to build up the family structure with an aim of raising children in faith. This supports results which have shown that migrants often transform their new faith based off of their understanding and familiarity (Tan 2014, preface). However, while the church focus may appear to reflect

Confucian values, to reach this goal is through Christian practices such as prayer, Bible study, serving in church, and spreading the gospel. In this way, we see how the Chinese church in particular, “helps its members to selectively preserve certain aspects of Chinese culture with transformative reinterpretation” (Yang 1999, 133).

Several of the participants displayed this blend of Confucian understanding as they connected Christianity with values of good behavior, harmony and peace. Joy explained that it was “*important to have faith so you can suppress your negative desires,*” later citing that her major goal was to live a peaceful life. However, she described how such a peace came through God saying, “*there is a purpose, which is God, in life. Because if you have a faith or belief, then you know everything is just experience, or a stage, just going through something.*” Thus, while she highlighted values of stability, she described the channel to attain them as located in a Christian belief. This belief helped to overcome everyday struggles by focusing instead on a God and faith that transcends territorial situations by giving a peace, located ‘elsewhere.’ Thus, we see the impact of ‘here’ and ‘there’ related to ideals of the after-life and how that affects life now (Erdal 2017). This blending of Confucian and Christian values, with the prioritization of religious beliefs displayed how “global religious institutions shape the transnational migration experience while migrants chip away at and recreate global religions by making them local and starting the process anew” (Levitt 2004, 3). Results aligned with Yang’s (1999, 132) study that showed how for transnational migrants, there may arise dual orientations and a personal repertoire of values drawn from diverse cultural configurations.

### *Identity*

Conversion experiences, the role of the church, and a reconfiguration of priorities and values combine to influence Chinese Christians and processes of identity (re)construction. In NCCC Stavanger, the majority of members are new converts, and many of the participants described personal transformation within their conversion. Pamela described how she was formerly a ‘difficult’ woman, when she read in the Bible how the woman should respect her husband and that the husband should be the head of the family. This triggered a desire to change as she realized that her behavior was not Biblical and not aligned with the identity of a ‘Godly woman.’ This displays the personal implications of a global belief system and exemplifies how transworld or “supranational” (Gladney 2012, 1465) Christian beliefs are manifested in practical, local ways.

NCCC Stavanger went through a theme titled “taking root below, bearing fruit above.” This encouraged the church to personally and communally practice spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting to build a Christian foundation. This shows that a transworld religious identification does not cause Chinese Christians to be detached from the everyday occurrences on earth. Rather, it impacts their identity to be an entity that is simultaneously in the world and outside of it. Jane reflected,

*So what is truth? So truth in the world does not exist. If I go out, or if I don't pay attention to the Bible or God's truth, then I lose myself, there would be no hope for life, and I wouldn't understand anything about what is meaning in life. Because everyone will die eventually, and if truth and life don't exist, then what is the meaning with living? If there is no truth, so I can just do what I want and that might hurt other people, but who cares, because we all die eventually anyway.*

We observe here how Jane places her identity in the meaning and truth that God has given through the Bible. Thus, her religious affiliation and beliefs feed her sense of self and purpose. We also see a reconfiguration of concepts like cultural identity, which Petkova (2015, 12; 19) argues, consists of different groups and communities with many identities and multiple personal allegiances.

Åse's experiences also challenge conventional views of identity as a simple entity. She is from China and married to a man from Hong Kong, who she helps run a Chinese food store in Norway. She is proficient in Norwegian and just finished a local professional qualification. She visits China one to two times a year, and the last time we spoke I was told she would be returning to encourage her father to become a Christian. When asked how she is connected to China she mentioned the Overseas Chinese church, but believes its mission is to care and love local people. She says that she often meets locals, commenting that “Norwegians are very nice...very.” She was also invited by Norwegian Christians to be part of an open prayer group. When asked to describe her identity and purpose in life, she boldly stated “*In my life, I want to live for Jesus.*” Thus, while her identity may be grounded in a faith that transcends the boundaries of nation-states, her daily experiences display transnational ties to China, Norway and the church. Furthermore, her transworld faith has implications within her physical, daily life that impacts not only herself, but also local people and society. This agrees with Ong and Nonini (1997, 24-25) who assert that transnational tactics on modern Chinese identities have helped redirect conventional assumptions of identity as something one has or possesses. Rather, identity is what connects people to society, allowing individuals to have multiple identities in relation to religion, gender, race,

etc. This means a person is a site of differences, where someone can be simultaneously Norwegian, Chinese, a parent, a Christian, and all of these together. This aligns with Yang's (1999, 183) theory of adhesive identities, where Chinese, host and Christian identities merge together. This not only influences migrant's sense of identity, but also their sense of community, and where they feel they belong.

### *Community*

"The initial attraction [to Christianity]... is often the loving community of the church and the intimacy of its fellowship" (Yang 1999, 88). Aligned with US Chinese Christians, most of the participants identified the people within the church as 'Christian' above 'Chinese.' While I argue that the role of religion for Chinese Christian immigrants is more complex than social capital or psychological support, these elements are still present to some degree. However, they are seen in relation to a community that perceives itself primarily by its religious identification rather than its ethnic affiliation.

In considering the context, it was also interesting to learn that many of the participants considered Norwegians to be non-Christian. This was given as the major reason for having deeper relationships with Christians in the Chinese church than with locals. Jane recalled how after she became a Christian she was no longer interested in hanging out with her Norwegian friends who she used to go to the bars with and get drunk. She said,

*You know, the Christian has another view on life and how to live life. So I cut out certain habits which were not reconciled with my faith. And I'm also concerned about church life and service for God, and how to live a Christian life. So my life motto became for other people, also the way I chose was completely different than before. Therefore, my group of friends is different than before...my family life is also now different than before because many members of my family are not Christians...they are more Norwegian than me now, ha.*

Thus, we see that her conversion influenced her relationships and where she felt she belonged, identifying instead with her community of shared faith. She also assumes that her family members, who are not Christians, are now more 'Norwegian' in this sense, as well. Pamela recalled taking her children out of a boy scout club ran by the Norwegian church, believing they were not teaching things which were according to the Bible. For her, it was important that her children go to the Chinese church to begin to know God and have community with similar youth. She described how the church community took responsibility for raising the kids in faith, hoping that they "*can go out into the society and can spread the*

*gospel back to the Norwegians, because now the Norwegian youth they are not Christian, so it is very sad.*” Thus, we see again the assumption that the dominant culture is primarily secular. Therefore, she described her friendships with fellow church members as deeper than with non-Christian friends, as they centered around the Bible and gave advice which was more meaningful.

Mingyu also found a greater spiritual fervor within the Chinese church than in the Norwegian church she had previously experienced. She explained,

*I think actually China is not a Christian country...but once people come to Jesus, they choose to believe, it's really a solid belief. But I was quite shocked, because before I come to Norway I think it's a Christian country, and almost everyone is Christian. But actually, most of them do not go to church. Or yeah, I don't think some take it as a belief. So maybe it's a habit for them or a tradition to be a Christian. Mm-hm, so it's a little bit different.*

Thus, we see that the community of the Chinese church is defined by its shared beliefs and Christian identity, with many seeing it as a source of fellowship that they could not receive elsewhere. These examples may also explain why Chinese Christians have not been very connected to local Norwegian Christians, outside of some building sharing and initial contact to Christianity through Norwegian Christian teachers, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, while many had Chinese and local, non-Christian friends, these relationships were described as less deep or influential in their lives. This agrees with Mori's (2014) study, which believes it is inadequate to explain conversion only in relation to assimilation, as many of the participants perceive Norway as a secular society. Thus, the ethnic church community shapes a sense of identity and belonging that runs contrary to dominant norms within the host society. Under such religious majority-minority dynamics (Phan and Tan 2013) one can see an increase in religious fervor and commitment. Thus, many of the participants have a strong focus and commitment to their Christian community as a primary source of fellowship.

## **Conclusion**

Within the investigation of the role of religion in processes of identity and belonging, we see a strong influence of beliefs on values, personal identity and relationships. It is important to consider multi-layered influences related to conversion experiences, the qualities and role of the church, and the impact of their beliefs in daily decisions. This is not to say that all Chinese Christian immigrants have the same experiences. As pointed out previously, Chinese immigrants convert for different reasons and the implications of that decision play out in

diverse ways. Furthermore, while there are elements of psychological support, social belonging and cultural attachments evident in the role of religion, I choose not to emphasize these in order to avoid simplified conclusions. Rather, I argue that within this study, the influence of migrant faith should be seen as multi-layered and complex. Instead, I highlight trends of transnationalism as seen within the members of NCCC Stavanger, the church, and the impact of their beliefs. Levitt (2007b) coins the phrase ‘the transnationalization of religious life,’ a concept which can be seen in the lives of Chinese Christian immigrants in Stavanger as they cope with the various dynamics of migration within the context of their Christian faith. Their beliefs transcend nation-state boundaries to influence both local and global realms. Furthermore, it not only impacts their thoughts and values, but their very understanding of who they are and where they feel they belong.

## Chapter Seven

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

Migration for the Chinese is nothing new, and as China develops as a global actor, the Chinese will likely continue to spread, move and re-settle. Yet, through increases in technology and communications immigrants can, and indeed desire, to maintain ties with their origin country. Chinese migrants have influenced Norway as they have brought over food, established catering businesses, and contributed to the landscape of a multicultural society. Yet they simultaneously negotiate their identity and belonging as they face new aspects of their host society. For Chinese Christians in particular, their religious beliefs and membership add an additional dynamic within this process of negotiation. These multiple ties to origin country, co-ethnics across the world and a religion that transcends nation-state boundaries, combine to display the complexity of the migrant situation, which can be increasingly defined as ‘transnational.’ This thesis aimed to investigate the experiences of Chinese Christian immigrants in Norway, and asked: 1) How do Chinese Christian immigrants negotiate their identities in a multicultural society like Norway? 2) How do they experience a sense of belonging as immigrants? And 3) What role does the Chinese church and their Christian beliefs have in shaping their identities and sense of belonging? I will take the answers to each of these questions in turn.

#### **Negotiation of Identity**

This thesis argues that Chinese Christians in Norway undergo a process of identity (re)construction in relation to transnational ties to China, selective acculturation to Norway, and their religious conversion. To investigate these multiple connections, I drew heavily on in-depth interviews with nine Chinese Christian immigrants and participant observation at NCCC Stavanger. The migration experience of Chinese immigrants and their struggles with things like the language, work, and climate have fed into a process of segmented assimilation. This process, together with transnational ties, has created a trend of adhesive identities where migrants hold multiple aspects of host and home societies simultaneously, creating a new and unique identity ‘blend.’ Within their negotiations, we see a reorientation of habitus and selective acculturation combined with a preservation of ethnic identity. This supports the idea



that identity is not what one has but rather consists of a multiplicity of group belongings, which is always evolving as one moves and continually changes. This shows an intertwined negotiation of ethnic, local and religious identity. I agree with Phan and Tan's (2013, 238) conclusion that there is often an overlap between faith, ethnicity and culture, which runs so deep that migrants can find it hard to separate them. These different identifications, pulled from a variety of sources, are further influenced by both global and local contexts.

Transnational identity is increasingly becoming the norm under the context of globalization. Migrants enjoy a new ease of sustaining ties across borders, but must also negotiate how to integrate within their host society and accomplish their own personal goals. I believe further studies that focus on these contexts, such as the attitudes and reception of the host society, would be beneficial to contribute to an understanding of the migrant situation and the formation of transnational identities.

### **Negotiation of Belonging**

Complexity and multiplicity of identity carries over to Chinese immigrants' sense of belonging, or where they feel at 'home.' I argue that transnational ties to one's origin country and co-ethnics do not necessarily run contrary to integration. Rather, it can contribute to a better understanding of multiculturalism, which under the context of globalization, has led to involvements and identification to a variety of sources. Chinese migrant experiences display a belonging to the Overseas Chinese community through friendships with co-ethnics, involvements in the Chinese church, and preservation of cultural traditions and foods. Many also continue to stay tied to China through the news and frequent visits home. However, Chinese migrants also sustain ties to Norway through their local involvements. Many speak Norwegian and live, work and volunteer alongside locals. They contribute to society in diverse ways, such as through the ethnic catering niche, taxes, and a general care and concern for local happenings. In this way, while their experiences display a continued attachment to China and the Chinese, many rationalize their sense of belonging according to where they live now, their current citizenship or personal preference. Most of those I spoke with were very satisfied with their lives in Norway, and felt 'home' within their new host society despite their ethnic lifestyles and partialities. It is interesting to observe this simultaneity of belonging, which reminds us that identity and belonging are not static notions but rather complex and fluid perceptions that are constantly evolving and in flux. Moreover, as Chinese immigrants who identify as Christian, there was a prioritization of religious belonging. For many of the participants in the study, the church was described as a family and Christian

friends highly valued. Furthermore, the positioning of the Chinese church under the NCCC umbrella created a religious belonging that was not limited to the local Chinese church in Stavanger, but extended globally to fellow Chinese Christians.

### **Impact of Religion**

Chinese Christian immigrants cannot be understood without examining the role of religion and its impact on identity (re)constructions and experiences of belonging. I argue that Overseas Chinese Christians are strongly influenced by their beliefs, particularly as many are new converts or become more committed through the migration experience. For some, they perceived that their Christian conversion completely transformed their identity. For many, this Christian identification also influenced their sense of belonging as they gained new friends and began to have different priorities. The ethnic church provides fellowship in the migrants' mother tongue, and encourages members to grow in their Christian identity through practices such as worship, prayer and Bible study. These Christian disciplines were emphasized as priorities for migrants, who emphasized Bible knowledge, praying with others, and gathering with brothers and sisters as important. These areas also made up authority structures that had practical implications on decisions, child-rearing, and friendships. Religion not only had a personal, individual impact on migrants, but also displayed a local and global influence. Locally, the Chinese church focuses on building up families, raising children in the faith, and evangelization to local Chinese, particularly those in catering. Globally, the church maintains connections to other Overseas Chinese Christian churches and organizations. Thus, we see the transnationalization of religious life where Christian beliefs and belonging to the church had a strong impact on migrants' identity and belonging, holding a high level of authority in such formations.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to understand the negotiation of identity and belonging of Chinese Christian immigrants as a process, where multiplicity and complexity define the balancing act of coping with migration experiences, sustaining ties to home, negotiating local involvements, and maintaining religious commitments. We must also realize that integration alongside ethnic preservation is becoming a common phenomenon within the modern age. As the world changes and we become increasingly connected across time and space, non-territorial and transworld identities may also appear to increase as the nation-state can no longer suffice for the reality of diverse, multiple and overlapping identities and simultaneous belonging. This is

the case for Chinese Christian immigrants whose faith penetrates their whole lives. This shows a close interrelation of religion and migration, where Christianity has not only transformed migrant's lives but ignites them to spread such transformation to others. Though their religious beliefs may add to the mucky process of (re)constructing their identity and belonging, they claim it is worth it for the meaning and peace it can bring in the midst of a complex and ever-changing world.

### **Further Recommendations**

As China develops into a global power, I believe there will be an increasing need for empirical research on contemporary Chinese identity. How is the new generation coping with the fast development of China? From what sources do they draw meaning and guidance for life? The topic of religion is also growing within China, and will be an area needing further research in the future. Will modern China make room for religious expression or will it continue to enforce secularity and material culture? In relation to Chinese migrants in Norway, I also think further research on identity and belonging within the second-generation would be beneficial. Since Norway is a relative latecomer to migration, there will surely be real changes and transformations within second, third, and fourth generations of Overseas Chinese. It will be interesting to see what will happen to NCCC Stavanger and how the faith of next generations will wane or develop, particularly as this is one of their major ministry focuses.

Integration is also an area needing further research. In asking several Norwegians their general impression of the Chinese community, they had few thoughts except that they were hard working, polite, and stayed to themselves. Several brought up apprehension towards their level of integration in Norwegian society, commenting on their tendency to group together with other ethnic Chinese. However, I believe this necessitates a clarification, not only within this thesis but also within society as a whole. There remains a confusion between the meaning of integration, or acculturating to a society while maintaining one's ethnic identity, and assimilation, where one (in theory) loses their ethnic affiliation and fully identifies with the host society (Tan 2004, 26; 41). While assimilation is still a popular term, it is often wrongly used as people actually describe integration, which involves a cultural assimilation but not necessarily an ethnic one. In fact, historically most Chinese immigrants have changed as they have adapted to different contexts, reconstructing 'Chineseness' as a result of localization brought about by their own initiative to interact and participate in society (Ibid., 3-4). Societal policies and attitudes must decide what defines

‘multiculturalism’ and whether a respect for ethnic preservation can contribute, rather than act contrary, to integration within contemporary immigration (Sternberg 2009, 108). One must ask if it is actually necessary to assimilate under the postmodern context of a globalized world. Indeed, Anthias (2006, 24) argues that critical multiculturalism ought to move away from dominant culture setting the frame of reference to allow for and celebrate transnational ethnic identities. I believe further research on this topic would be very helpful, particularly as questions arise over immigration and multiculturalism, and how to handle the emerging complexity of the modern world.

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### **Participant Interviews:**

- Interview with Karen on 15 June 2017
- Interview with Joy on 18 June 2017
- Interview with Åse on 19 June 2017
- Interview with Pamela 24 June 2017
- Interview with Timmy 24 June 2017
- Interview with Mingyu on 25 June 2017
- Interview with Dan on 26 June 2017
- Interview with Jane on 2 July 2017
- Interview with Lijuan on 7 July 2017

## **Appendix**

### *Appendix A: Interview Consent given to Pastor Yeung*

#### **Request for participation in research project**

#### **"Understandings of Identity and Belonging: A Case Study of Chinese Immigrants in Stavanger"**

##### **Background and Purpose**

The purpose of this research project is to better understand the lives and integration of Chinese migrants. The main research aim is to learn more about how the Chinese experience immigration with a focus on identity and belonging in Norway, as well as what impact personal beliefs may have in these experiences and formation. There seems to be very little literature on the Chinese community in Stavanger, so I believe this study will contribute to better understand this migrant group. The project is part of the Masters of Global Studies program at VID Specialized University in Stavanger.

The sample of persons to be interviewed has been selected through the use of personal networks and connections, which is how you have been chosen to participate.

##### **What does participation in the project imply?**

The data for this project will mostly come from interviews that I will conduct for 5-7 weeks within the summer of 2017. I will also retrieve secondary data regarding statistics of immigration, the history of the Chinese in Norway, and other relevant information through written and online academic sources and records. Questions will concern your personal experiences in moving to Norway, what your life is like now, your connection to Norway and/or China, as well as your personal beliefs. The data will be collected through an audio recording, and later transcribed. I will also take several general and observational notes after the interview is over. You may ask to keep part of the interview out of the analysis, and can request to see the questionnaire/interview guide prior to our meeting.

##### **What will happen to the information about you?**

All personal data will be treated confidentially. Me and my supervisor will be the only ones who have access to any personal data. All personal data and recordings will be stored to ensure confidentiality. All names or personal information that may reveal your identity will be stored separately from other data and protected from unauthorized access.

Participants will not be recognizable in the publication. Your name will be anonymized and assigned a pseudonym within the final analysis.

The project is scheduled for completion by June 2018. All personal data and recordings will be destroyed at this point. All anonymized data will be stored for further use on a protected

online registrar, but will not be traceable to any of your personal data.

### **Voluntary participation**

It is voluntary to participate in the project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason. If you decide to withdraw, all your personal data will be made anonymous.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact me, Sarah Normann at +47 45838863 or my supervisor, Kari Storstein Haug at +47 5151 6230/ +47 452 33 984.

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

### *Appendix B: Interview Guide*

#### **Experience:**

- When did you come to Norway?
- What did you do before moving to Norway?
- Why did you decide to come here?
- What was your experience like moving from China to Norway?
  - o What happened when you came to Norway?
  - o How have you settled down?
- What is your current situation?
  - o Are you working?
- How long have you been here now?
  - o Do you plan to stay?

#### **Identity:**

- How was it to adjust to the Norwegian society and culture?
  - o *If more detail needed* - What things have been enjoyable or frustrating?
- Are you in contact with China in any way?
  - o Do you still visit? How often?
  - o Do you keep up with the news?
  - o Do you ever have visitors from China?
  - o Do you follow worship services from China online?
  - o Do you attend any Chinese cultural events?

- Social media connection, ie. FB, Twitter, Skype?

**Belonging:**

- Can you tell me a little bit about how you are involved here in Norway?
  - Do you attend Norwegian festivals or events?
  - Do you work in a Norwegian working place?
  - Do you have kids?
  - Do you eat Norwegian food or follow Norwegian meal times?
  - Are you involved in any local clubs or volunteer work?
- What do you think Norwegians think about Chinese people?
- Do you have any contact with Norwegians? If so, in what way?
- Would your friends be mostly Chinese or Norwegian?
  - Why do you think it's this way?
- Do you feel satisfied living here?
  - Do you feel that you are part of society?
  - Would you say Norway is your home now?
- What makes you feel at home in Norway?
  - How do you consider yourself? Would you say you are Chinese, Norwegian, both?
- Do you ever miss China? What do you do when you feel that way?
  - Are there certain things that remind you of China?

**Religion:**

- When did you start going to the Chinese church?
  - How did you discover it? How often do you go?
- Can you tell me a little bit about what happens in the meetings?
  - Do you have any special role or responsibility?
  - Are you part of any Bible/small groups or other church activities?
- Why do you think you attend these services?
  - What do you feel you get out of it?
  - Have you ever gone to a Norwegian church?
    - If yes, how did you find it?
    - If not, why not?
    - Why do you think it is good to have a Chinese church in Stavanger?
  - Are you part of the Chinese church for specific reasons?
- Were you a Christian before moving to Norway?

- If yes, did you attend similar meetings back in China?
  - Was it the same or different?
  - In what ways?
- If no, how was the process of making that decision and/or joining the church?
- How do you think your faith has impacted your experiences here in Norway?
  - What has it meant for you as an immigrant? (ie. Has it strengthened you?)
  - What role did the church have in this?
- Out of curiosity, what would you say is the main purpose of the Christian faith?
- What would you describe as the main purpose of life?